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Establishing Comic Nescience: An Investigation into Humour Theory, and Comical Treatments of Successful Heroes and Scholars

by

Dalbir S. Sehmby ©

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Abstract

Establishing Comic Nescience: An Investigation into Humour Theory, and Comical Treatments of Successful Heroes and Scholars presents an alternative to understanding comical art. Comic nescience does not claim to replace existing theories, but offers critical attention to and thus incorporates some of the more enigmatic qualities of funniness into humour theory. Theoretically, comic nescience treats humour as a fluctuating dynamic of forces (knowing/unknowing, understanding/misunderstanding, the logical/illogical, the ridiculous/the ludicrous, and laughing at/laughing with) that produce a range of effects, such as homogenous, relatively stable, and unified meaning, or heterogeneous, unstable, and contradictory meaning. Expanding comedy's traditional notion of the happy end, comic nescience claims some comical works within the historical democratic American context exhibit an ongoing tension between a teleological ideal and the shortcomings of human practice; as a result, the happy philosophical end of American comical works is continually pursued (and revised), but never achieved. Comical works police the gap between ideal and practice or debate (to preserve, revise, or qualify) basic cultural values and concepts. One such concept concerns an intersection of success, knowledge, agency, and ability, represented by the hero and academic. Adapting the ancient term *nescire*, or ignorance, this study lends value to the state of unknowing by demonstrating how some comical works, through their more ambiguous, uncertain, and multiple qualities, complicate the successful (through his or her own agency and ability) individual. Comical interrogations (from literature, film, and broadcast media) of the American hero and parodic treatments of the North American

academic persona complicate upward mobility, upholding and/or subverting the successful individual, and revealing a mix of elements involved in success and failure. Comic nescience allows the opposing aims and effects of comical works to co-exist, demonstrating how, for comical art, seriousness and silliness are not necessarily exclusive absolutes, but an intermingled whole. Addressing their uncertainty, multiplicity, and ambiguity, certain comical works admit (beyond ability and agency) the influence of factors, such as chance, social standards, and contextual parameters, in the creation of the successful hero and intellectual.

For my grandparents
My teachers, parents, siblings, wife, and family
Dedicated to Prof. Bill Meilen, Sept. 16, 1932 to Sept. 4, 2006

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Introduction

"I don't know."
(James Thurber, "University Days," *Insights into Literature*, 323)

Introduction I: Starting Points

Introduction I. A. "I Don't Know": Introducing the Concept

Throughout his anecdotal short story about his time at university, James Thurber recounts his intellectual and physical shortcomings, illustrating how he barely passed Botany, Economics, Physical Education, and after failing several times, chanced upon some success in the school's compulsory military drills. While the non-fiction plays for laughs, Thurber's account reveals something embarrassingly valid about the human experience: we are not always highly capable beings, especially in new areas of learning or unfamiliar subject matter. We fumble, we make mistakes, and if his teachers are any indicators, we forget that such pratfalls are a part of the learning (perhaps living) process, choosing instead to divide humanity into the successful and the unsuccessful, the capable and the incapable. It is also telling that humans often cling to a small range of abilities that they do not completely foul up, in order to foster a career, and even claim expertise. As is typical of the undergraduate experience, while his teachers focus their professional lifetimes on one main subject area, like a *picaro*, the student moves from one field to another. Fulfilling the compulsory hurdles, the student faces the difficulty of looking at the world as a scientist would plants, as a business person does finances, and an athlete does sports, all within the span of a day. In Thurber's case, the student must repeatedly visit the same instructors until at least a minimal standard of success is achieved; in contrast, Thurber's professors repeat similar material and testing year after year, building upon their knowledge, comfortably existing in the security of their specific subject area, and enjoying the authority afforded them by the institution.

Over time, as evidenced by Thurber's refusal to forget his university days and the story's last lines that claim the opposite, like his instructors, we may even stop thinking about our own shortcomings, narrowly but confidently believing in our own prowess within whatever areas we devote most of our time and energies to. While such a reflection on the human condition is somewhat unflattering, it may make Thurber's last sentences all the more important: "I don't know. I don't think about it much any more" (323). Whereas the story proves otherwise, that Thurber does think about his fumbling past, Thurber's "I don't know," comes at what should be the happy resolution of the story, perhaps signalling that any amount of recollection does not easily lead to ideal closure. Instead of a great final conflict with his superior, General Littlefield, who summoned the young scholar into his office, Thurber is simply invited and then dismissed. The name Littlefield is telling, because for all his power, like the other instructors, in terms of knowledge, the military leader can only claim to be the general of a relatively little field. On a wider more philosophical scale, the short story reveals that an individual's belief in his or her own knowing not only lacks humility, but also, such overconfidence marginalizes the role of chance and uncertainty. Is the world as knowable as the varying university courses and their professors imply? Perhaps not, but a negative response also rings true at some level of certainty; that is, Thurber's world is neither absolutely knowable nor unknowable.[1] Hence, it may be more appropriate to leave things at Thurber's "I don't know."

Thurber cultivates uncertainty during the final phase of his autobiographical musings. After an irrelevant (although symbolic) exchange about swatting mosquitoes, General Littlefield simply lets Thurber go. The exchange leaves Thurber pondering the significance of the office visit.[2] Rather than taking the role of the narrator who correctly senses what another character is thinking, Thurber offers a few possibilities, but concludes with a frank, "I don't know" (323). Despite the status of American genius espoused upon Thurber for his writing and cartoons, Thurber humbly indicates that the gap between the knowing and the unknowing is a small, culturally determined one. In Thurber's case, while America considers him a great artist, his university professors dismissed him as a foolish dolt. Forgetting that the gap between those applauded and those dismissed is small (and socially-determined) may turn us into growling fly-swatting Generals, who overlook the *picaro* inside of us. Willing to face the embarrassment of being branded unknowing, the student Thurber, instead of learning to swat others for their lack of expertise, falls and gets back up, moving from one episode of exploration to another. From his uncertain declaration near the story's end, it seems as though Thurber continues his exploration beyond the university. Although "University Days" is a reflection, time and maturity have not brought answers. Thurber cannot make full sense of his experiences, leaving us with the comically uncertain, "I don't know."

---

[1] Conceiving the world as neither absolutely knowable nor unknowable does not mean there is a total absence of "logic" in the structure of "University Days." In *Laughter*, Henri Bergson speaks of a comic logic, and in *Wit and its Relations to the Unconscious*, Sigmund Freud speaks of sense in nonsense. In "University Days," Thurber reaches the conception of comic uncertainty through a structure that is intrinsic to the short story's parody of the genre. In other words, Thurber's short story has its own internal logic, subverting a short story's climactic closure (the solution to the problem) by offering a non-resolution. The technique is akin to the role reversal (a man disguises as a woman) or the joke's twist (where expectation is thwarted). Owing to the comic stress on form, by thwarting the expected structure of a standard short story, "University Days," is also reflexive, disclosing short story structure by deviating from it.

[2] Implicitly, for Thurber and the other students he describes, higher education involves superiors swatting around students, and then, graduating.

This thesis, "Establishing Comic Nescience," explores the intersection of the comic and those qualities (in humour theory and comical texts) that fall under the notion of uncertainty, ambiguity, and multiplicity. To distinguish uncertainty (from other sorts of artistic ambiguity) as viewed from a comic perspective, the thesis introduces the term, comic nescience.[3] A first step towards adding the concept of comic nescience to the vernacular of contemporary humour theory, textual support comes in the form of (primarily) Anglo-American comic complications (essays, short stories, films, and stand up comedy routines) of the hierarchical divide between success and failure (identifiable in the popular conception of the Alger myth). The thesis analyzes texts that comically interrogate the confident cognizant agency and prestige of heroes and intellectuals, two figures who, because of their prowess and skill, are identifiable as successful and superior examples of human ability. Before expressing the dissertations' central foci, some foundational vocabulary requires introduction.

Introduction I. B. *Nescire* and the Comic: Two Key Terms

Two key terms help begin the exploration of funniness and uncertainty: comic and nescience. Comic, a more widely circulated term than "nescient," has a correspondingly more extensive meaning. Comic may refer to illustrated periodicals featuring the adventures of superheroes, graphic novels, newspaper humour strips, professional comedians, or, for the focus here, texts inciting laughter. In terms of the longstanding formal sense, comedy refers to an amusing drama, moving towards a happy end. Within the realm of literature, comic may refer to any of those scenes or genres that may incite laughter, ranging from informal humorous elements within an otherwise serious work or interludes within medieval mystery plays to the more formal categories of comedy, parody, satire, and irony. If the number of hybrid designations is an indicator of the difficulty defining these terms in a concrete fashion, then comedy seems to be the most paired of the terms, resulting in a variety of genre marriages. For instance, in mainstream film, where hybridization is preferred for its potential to generate wider audiences, there are, amongst others, romantic comedies, action comedies, and tragic-comedies. In part, because comedy (and its categorical relatives) are so overused, the study of humour may benefit from the addition of a new term, nescience, in order to develop an understanding of the comical, or those works that inspire humorous pleasure, that emphasizes the more uncertain elements of comic expression, reception, and artistry.

---

[3] Uncertainty within comic confines may have a certain aim, such as generating laughter or advancing a particular argument. Hence, uncertainty in comic texts may point to varying degrees of openness or closure. The emphasis here is not to chart an ultimate end of comic texts, but to explore that component of comic art, comic nescience, that generates some level of ambiguity or momentary unknowing.

Nescire is a Latin word meaning, “not know,” from *ne*, for “not,” and *scire*, for “to know.” *Scire* is recognizable as the root of the contemporary term, science, from *scientia*, which originally referred to knowledge of any kind, but over the last few centuries, science identifies the systematic study of natural phenomena.[4] A familiarity with the term science as opposed to nescience may point to how we (as contemporary English-language speaking North Americans) value and institutionalize knowledge and knowing, but limit the lack of knowing to something negative or derogatory.[5] While science is a common term, nescience, fittingly, is a term that most people do not know. Because of the lack of circulation afforded *nescire* and nescience, and because of its original Latin definition of "not knowing," nescience is an appropriate starting point to articulate those elements of laughter-inspiring comic texts that gesture towards uncertainnty. Such uncertainty may include a lack of knowing, a lack of agency, chance, contradiction, and ambiguity – without the traditionally negative bias. In this study then, expanding from its origin (as synonymous with ignorant), nescience encompasses varying qualities of uncertainty, ambiguity, and multiplicity in the understanding of humour and in the understanding of success. With humour, comic nescience brings a term to that elusive quality of comic texts and the difficulty of comic categorization, while overcoming the exclusiveness of the three major schools of comic theory. In other words, comic nescience can also refer to a varying range of knowing and unknowing one may experience with different types of jokes or comical moments. In addition, this study interrogates some key claims of superiority theory. Through an analysis of texts that comically complicate our notion of successful cognizant agents (heroes and academics), this investigation of comic nescience also complicates the culture's often sharp and

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[4] These definitions and etymological references are paraphrased from *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, ninth edition.

[5] The cultural bias of asserting the assuredness of knowing exists in language itself, with ignorance harbouring an undertone of stupidity. In *Ignorance and Uncertainty*, on page two, Smithson demonstrates

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the linguistic bias towards not knowing by citing Unger: "Unger (1975) has observed that ordinary language is more direct and clear in matters of fact and knowledge than it is in ignorance. While we may say "Joe knows that Clara is pregnant" we cannot express ignorance in a similarly direct way. To phrase ignorance in the active voice we must use negation ("Joe does not know that Clara is pregnant"). The sole active voice construction for ignorance does not merely indicate a state of nonknowledge. The statements "Joe ignores Clara's pregnancy" or "Joe ignores the fact that Clara is pregnant" fails to convey the simple opposite of knowledge about Clara's pregnancy. A passive voice construction for ignorance is possible, but even then it is not as direct as its knowledge-oriented counterpart. Compare "Joe is informed that Clara is pregnant" with "Joe is ignorant *of the fact* that Clara is pregnant". To omit the italicized words in the second sentence makes it a deviant construction in English." In other words, the English language has a bias against non-knowledge, preferring to orient its users under the safety blanket of certainty. Consider, for instance, the difficulty of describing the intellectual capacity of a baby, who is ignorant of the world around him or her, is ignorant of language, or is ignorant of what is safe and what is dangerous. Calling someone ignorant has a derogatory implication, unless he or she is a baby, but even then, ignorant does not seem to be the correct word as it is commonly used to indicate stupidity or narrow-mindedness. The difficulty with the language of success and failure will be taken up in Chapter V, "The Western Mythos of Success."

hierarchical distinction between prowess and weakness. The textual evidence associates superiority and success, locating the importance of both concepts within the tradition of the American dream.

Although nescience originally means, "not knowing," comic nescience can signal or associate with a type of knowing in three ways. With the first way, if one accepts the role of chance, circumstance, and other factors outside of causal agency, when it comes to one's success or understanding, then one may be demonstrating some wisdom. In this study, the cognizant (or knowing) agent refers to an individual [a fictional character (often a protagonist), a cultural icon (hero), or a social icon (scholar)] who has been or continues to be recognized as an entity who exercises agency.[6] The second way comic nescience associates with knowing is by not implying all humorous texts exhibit unknowing equally. Far from it, in fact, comic nescience is interested in qualifying the study of humour, by questioning the exclusive and totalizing tendencies of theories, and through the establishment of the idea of dynamic comical forces. Comic nescience describes a dynamic range of comical forces that exhibit varying tensions and may even overlap with one another. The third way comic nescience relates with knowing is through an active partnership with unknowing, best evident in some simple jokes, where listeners anticipate the punch line (knowingly discover the twist), but playfully so (remain "unknowing" until their guess is confirmed). Audience relations with joke material vary, exhibiting a range of knowing and unknowing, feigned or genuine.

---

[6] Within the American context, success stems from the self-made individual. As a result, the responsible individual exemplifies human prowess, physical and/or intellectual.

Here, unless specified, the terms comic and humour refer to laughter-inciting texts. Concerning the distinction between the comic and the humorous, in *Parody*, Margaret Rose points out:

> Eco expands on Pirandello's already arbitrary twentieth-century distinction between the comic and the humorous to suggest that where comedy and carnival do not really transgress the rule, but reinforce and remind us of it, humour, in being 'metasemiotic', can both 'cast in doubt other cultural codes' and show us 'the structure of our own limits.' (247)

While Eco's attempts to distinguish between different types of texts, Rose claims his distinction is largely arbitrary, lacking both historical grounding and contemporary circulation/validation.[7] Originally, humour is a medical term, linked to literature via Jonson's theory of characterization, not ideological questioning.[8] Alternatively, in *The Oxford Companion to the English language*, "humour is currently a disposition towards pleasantry, often realized in the enjoyment of anecdotes, jokes, puns, repartee, riddles, wisecracks, and witticism" (486). A myriad of critics use humour in a general sense, to identify funniness. One of the world's largest organizations of academic research into funniness is the International Society of Humor Studies (ISHS). Hence, along with Eco's hierarchical fashion, scholars use comic and humour interchangeably.

Eco's claim that humour can draw attention to cultural codes, while the comic reinforces dominant ideology may largely be a matter of interpretation, rather than an inherent and easily identifiable textual quality. Moreover, Eco cannot provide a standard measuring stick for identifying when a text is humorous or when a text is comic. While Eco justifiably claims carnival is not necessarily as subversive as Bakhtin hopes, Eco's differentiation between the comic and humour is weak; Eco downplays the role of variant audience interpretation, and parallels the very problem he identifies in Bakhtin. Bakhtin's claim that carnival is revolutionary bears little difference from Eco's claim that humour is revolutionary. Perhaps the matter of determining whether carnival, the comic, or humour, is either conservative or rebellious stems from a myriad of factors (political climate, time period, cultural sphere) aside from the text itself or a critic's inclinations. Arguably, a text may be conservative to some, but subversive to others. In fact, this is what Bakhtin and Eco demonstrate. Bakhtin wants to see carnival as subversive, but Eco does not. Despite their disagreement, hundreds of researchers around the world are engaging in the study of humour, and their definition does not limit humour to being either conservative or subversive.[9] If one acknowledges that funny texts do not exist in isolation, and are open to differing readings in different contexts, then it is fair to say that comic texts bear a quality of uncertainty or nescience. Central to comic nescience, the power of some funny texts is their elusive quality that makes them hard to pin down (easily and absolutely) as either of one political affiliation or another.

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[7] Rose does not directly explain why she calls Eco's distinction arbitrary. To qualify Rose, Eco's distinction appears related to the wit and humour distinction in the English tradition.

[8] From a differing perspective than Eco, in *Feeling and Form*, Susan Langer aims to distinguish laughter, humour, and comedy. For Langer, laughter is physical, and humour is "one of the causes of laughter". For Langer, "humor has its home in comic drama. Laughter springs from its very structure" and "Humor is not the essence of comedy, but only one of its most useful and natural elements" (346).

Introduction I. C. Me Wanna Go Home: An Introductory Example

This study's use of the term comic nescience emphasizes the more enigmatic element of artistic texts that incite laughter, claiming some uncertainty characterizes some comic communication. Rather than choosing to debate over how conservative or subversive a funny text may or may not be, this analysis shifts the focus towards appreciating comic texts (conservative or subversive; comedic, parodic, or satiric; literary, film, or media) for their element of uncertainty and ambiguity. The claim is as follows: whether a simple joke or a more sustained work, some comic texts exhibit a level of uncertainty, ambiguity, or multiplicity that warrants academic exploration. For instance, there may be a sense of ambiguity in a work that leads to multiple and simultaneous readings. Sypher in "The Meanings of Comedy" speaks of a double-ness or ambivalence in comic texts: "The ambivalence of comedy reappears in its social meanings, for comedy is both hatred and revelry, rebellion and defence, attack and escape. It is revolutionary and conservative. Socially, it is both sympathy and persecution" (255). Extending Sypher, more than double-ness, multiplicity, layers of elements that allow for differing, but simultaneous meanings, also identify comical art.

---

[9] Although the general understanding towards humour (until the eighteenth century) may have been a conservative one, humour may not have always functioned in an exclusively conservative manner. Indeed, Bakhtin attempts to reinterpret past instances of comic displays.

For an introductory, and relatively recent, example applying the vantage point of comic nescience, consider the Internet comic cartoon film, *Day-O, Mr. Taliban Song* (http://www.superlaugh.com/1/dayo.htm). Searching out Osama Bin Laden, the song can be a comic attack on the Taliban. However, with the sensitivity of 9/11 and images of a smiling George Bush playing the conga drums, the song also makes light of the US commitment to locating terrorists. Although one could make an argument either way and debate over whether the piece is either in support of Bush or whether the piece does not take Bush's claim to hunt out Bin Laden seriously, by approaching the work through the theoretical lens of comic nescience, one can notice the ability for comic material to foster some level of ambiguity.[10] In this case, for instance, the film depicts Bin Laden on a magic carpet diverting bombs, Powell as Harry Belafonte, and Bush on drums; to a certain degree, such instances hide the film's political motivation.[11] This type of uncertainty may be a crucial element for the often taboo-bending quality of comic art.[12]

---

[10] Chances are the film's original intent is aggressive, because it is a simple play on sound, with "Tally man" and "Taliban" sounding similar. Despite this, one may interpret the film in multiple fashions.

Acknowledging comic uncertainty is not to say that some texts are not identifiably political in one way or another; at times, the politics of a comic work are relatively clear. In addition, acknowledging uncertainty does not claim that all laughter occurs because of an uncertain element in a joke or comic text. Indeed, some, if not much, laughter is aroused, because of a relatively certain (or at least perceived as certain) relationship between text/performer and audience. Readers may appreciate a joke even if they know the punch line; viewers may return to a comic film, even if they have already experienced all of the silly surprises. On that note, perhaps surprise twist is not the best term for a joke's characteristic mechanism. At times, a comic twist in dialogue or plot may genuinely surprise a reader/listener/viewer, but not always. A listener/viewer may expect a surprise twist, but may not know exactly what or how the twist will manifest itself. A listener/viewer may anticipate the surprise, taking pleasure in having his or her guesses confirmed. Hence, a surprise twist does not always signify that a listener/viewer is genuinely shocked. In terms of politics, a comedian's politics, even if known, may be more ambiguous than interpreted, because texts are deemed comical not because of their politics, but because of their ability to generate laughter; in other words, for some artists, producing laughs is privileged over (or alongside) producing political converts.[13]

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[11] The cartoon is made more complicated by the fact that the song parodies Harry Belafonte's famous "Banana Boat Song." Belafonte is a noted and somewhat controversial Civil Rights activist, who was an outspoken supporter of Martin Luther King. In terms of controversy, when appearing on a Petula Clark special for the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) in 1968, during a song, the white American Petula Clark touched the arm of the Jamaican-American Belafonte. The gesture made national news, with a sponsor of the show, Plymouth Motors, threatening to cease the show's funding. In 2002, Belafonte was a vocal protestor of Bush policies, at one point (on the *Democracy Now!* news program and on *Larry King Live*) Belafonte referred to a Malcolm X speech that distinguished between "field negroes" and "house negroes," implying that African-Americans Colin Powell and Condoleezza Rice were house slaves for Bush. In other words, there may be layers, whether intended or not, to the Internet cartoon *Day-O, Mr. Taliban* that leaves some viewers feeling uncertain about the song's dynamics and implications.

[12] Rather than "taboo-breaking," comic art may be "taboo-bending." Funny texts are socially sanctioned forms of taboo breaking, so the notion of breaking a taboo is somewhat misleading. From one perspective, if certain topics are taboo, then some jokes do indeed break taboos. From another perspective, since jokes are so commonplace and since jokes often concern supposedly taboo subjects, such as sex, then jokes are not necessarily breaking any social barrier. In addition, in terms of comic artistry, whereas an insult or a shocking statement or act may break a taboo, funny material is not simply about breaking (insulting or shocking), but about bending. Put another way, whereas taboo breaking implies that one has crossed some black and white line, comical art may be more concerned with the space in between those black and white categories. In terms of taboos, in contemporary times, sex, for instance, is taboo, yet widely discussed in popular culture, magazines, television series, films, and so on.

If one has ever found oneself asking, "Are we supposed to laugh at this?" then, one touches upon an uncertain moment in comic appreciation. The implied answer to such a question is both emotional and social, to cite Henri Bergson. In *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, Bergson builds his understanding of the comic spirit on three fundamental observations: one, the comic involves human interpretation; two, laughter requires an absence of feeling; three, laughter is a social phenomenon. Although in the translation referenced, Bergson uses the terms "human interpretation" and "social phenomenon," what Bergson means is a type of social approval. Of course, all artistic works involve human interpretation and are social phenomena; indeed, all art may also involve some sort of social approval. Nevertheless, with some qualifications, Bergson's approach is a highly valuable route into analysis.

For instance, how are "we" to interpret *Day-O, Mr. Taliban Song*? The "we" (or social group) for Bergson is crucial. For the first fundamental, the comic does indeed involve human interpretation (Bergson's third point is closely connected to his first); however, some laughter happens almost instantaneously, without conscious interpretation.[14] In these instances, two observations qualify Bergson. One, the laugher has internalized certain social values, so although he or she appears to laugh instantaneously, his or her laughter is a learned response. Interpretation is happening, but it has become too reflexive to observe. Two, with *Day-O, Mr. Taliban Song*, the laugher's pause for social approval may be more easily observable, because of the tragic events the film references. Because of the tragic events associated with the comic film, are we to laugh at it, with it, or not at all?[15] Here, we may look to our neighbours for approval. Doing so illustrates how the social element of humour – although a conditioned reflex in some instances – is a negotiation of sorts.[16]

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[13] Of course, one could say that all comic expression is political. However, that would be more broad use of the term political than is implied in this sentence. In this case, politics refers to specific and explicit ideological affiliation or implications made by an author, performer, and/or text.

To take up the importance of the Bergsonian "we" doing the laughing, the basic possibilities of laughing at, with, or not at all also implies that, no matter how unified in other ways, there may be segments of any one population who react to *Mr. Taliban Song* in at least these three different ways. The laughter response by the community is diverse, containing an important variable of uncertainty. *Mr. Taliban Song*, as effective humour, does not guarantee to arouse laughter for all audience members, or to arouse laughter in audience members for the same reason. Bergson's second fundamental claims, "the comic demands something like a momentary anesthesia of the heart" (www.authorama.com/laughter-2.html). As it relates to the tragic events of September 11th, Bergson's second point holds up, to a certain degree. Critical detachment helps viewers appreciate the comic craft of the film; spectators may enjoy the silliness of the song, the parody, the form, and so on. However, emotion is not absent. Indeed, there may be hatred fuelling some of the laughter; the film could be a cathartic experience for some, where Bin Laden is a target of ridicule. Supporters and critics of the administration may find joy in the film's portrayal of Bush and Powell. Supporters may delight in the way Bush and Powell cheerfully promise revenge; in this way, the song is motivating rally, a jingoistic cheer, not unlike a school football song before the big game. Critics of Bush and Powell may also enjoy their portrayal, as a demonstration of how the film's simplistic portrayal of a complex political situation reflects Bush and Powell's jingoistic politics. In another way, there may be a love for comical art that motivates the viewing of some spectators; the film may be a chance for playful (and healthy) escape from the tragedy itself.

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[14] In addition, it may be possible that babies and toddlers laugh without regard for wide social approval.

[15] Laughter may arise for any number of reasons. A few possibilities include laughing at tragedy, because it is taboo, laughing to cope with tragedy, or laughing out of anger.

[16] The function of social approval points out a couple of important elements that may not be limited to something as blatant as *Day-O, Mr. Taliban Song*. One, if an individual looks for approval in order to laugh, then feelings of inappropriateness linger around comical material. Two, an individual may not personally enjoy a joke, but because he or she seeks social approval, he or she may laugh anyway and perhaps even learn to like a type of humour.

Bergson's third fundamental asserts laughter is a social phenomenon (www.authorama.com/laughter-2.html). Since Bergson's third fundamental ties into his first, discussion of the first element has already dealt with the social element. Nevertheless, ambiguity and multiple readings warrant further discussion. *Mr. Taliban Song* simultaneously unifies and divides the laughing community. The assumption here is that people (even a relatively homogenous group) have different senses of humour, varying levels of tastes, and a diversity of comic preferences. Any one audience may consist of such variety; so, it may be misleading to believe that all members of a community are aroused to laughter for the same underlying reason. Adding to this qualification of Bergson, note how people in a group may laugh, even if they do not find something funny. If laughter is social, then laughter occurs not only because a comical text inspires it, but also because a community of people have their own dynamics that, to a certain degree, influence the volume of laughter. The status of the joke teller or maker of a witty comment comes into play; for instance, graduate students may be eager to laugh at the bad jokes of their superiors to seek approval or to make it appear as though they understand their professor's witty references to medieval Latin or ancient Sanskrit. A locker room of macho boys may laugh uproariously at jokes that, when around their mother, they would vehemently abhor. On that point, some may choose not to laugh, but to censor a comedian, in order to ostracize him or her from the social group. Comedy may have a social function, but that function does not always have only a direct connection with the textual or performative stimulus.

While there are elements of certainty involved in comic expression, reception, and artistry, from the perspective being urged here, from the theory of comic nescience, the joking relationship between text and reader/listener/viewer signals some level of uncertainty and ambiguity that is worth exploring and even establishing as a crucial element of comic art. For instance, while some readers may laugh because they recognize the joke, others may laugh because they do not; varied readings by audience members points to heterogeneity in comic interpretation; that is, while an entire audience may laugh, they may by laughing for a range of reasons, rather than one immutable and easily identifiable comic trigger. Responding to *Mr. Taliban Song*, some may laugh at the stereotypical depiction of Bin Laden on a magic carpet, while others may laugh at the silly parody of a classic song. It is even possible that some audiences laugh at the comic work itself, as something that fails to amuse. The depictions of Bush, Powell, and Bin Laden can be taken as pathetic misfires and hence, the objects of the audience's ridicule. Although one may understand the structure of a joke, laughter does not always derive from a surprise twist. Rather, comic performance and comic texts bear a tone of complex artistic uncertainty that is an important, if overlooked, element of comic expression.

I. D. Assumptions: The Comical as Artistic Enigma and Humbling Dynamic of Unknowing/Knowing

Will Kaufman in *The Comedian as Confidence Man* coins the phrase "irony fatigue," believing some American comedians embody a difficultly uncertain position between the need to generate (non-serious) laughter and the desire to offer (serious) political criticism. While for Kaufman the strained position veers upon situating comedians as tragic, misunderstood artists, here such an in-between position is not regarded as wholly negative or tragic. While there may be an element of tragic misunderstanding to many great comic artists, artistically, the position of uncertainty is fitting for a comic artisan who wants to keep his or her audience guessing, and thus comically surprised.[17] A state of uncertain suspension is pivotal for even the listener of a joke, who confidently awaits a line that baffles his or her ability to foresee the appropriate pattern. More importantly, fostering ambiguity adds to the complexity of the comedian's art. Delivering effective comedy is more than simply taking aim at a comic target, expressing taboo subjects, or providing surprise twists. The art of some comedy also involves conjuring an element of the enigmatic. In other words, one major assumption in this dissertation is that some comic works demonstrate a multiplicity of functions achieved by fostering an enigmatic polish.

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[17] The comic may take on the persona of a fool, not because his or her political message is overlooked, but because like Thurber in "University Days," a human being is positioned in more humble terms within humorous parameters than perhaps within more heroic or serious parameters.

The idea of complementary forces is fundamental to comic nescience's view of some comical texts. Comical material often pivots on a dynamic understanding/misunderstanding or unserious/serious that can lead to a range of interpretations, or, more basically, identify the risk of comical communication. Another major assumption in this study is as follows: by placing readers or viewers into positions of comic suspension, comic art values a relationship between unknowing and knowing. As for Thurber in "University Days," the gap here (between unknowing and knowing) may also be a small, socially determined one. Hence, the ability for a simple joke to thwart a listener's ability to foresee a pattern in favour of a comic twist is one basic means of valuing unknowing without necessarily reducing unknowing to something negative, such as stupidity. If humans value knowledge and the power that comes with it, then jokes are humbling forces that (momentarily) thwart our comfortable positions of knowing. From this assumption, one may ask, why are humans interested in being fooled, in being comically shaken out of their position as knowing and oriented subjects who can effectively foresee patterns? As with most questions asking why, this can be answered in a number of ways, but this study chooses a manner that argues for the humbling value of appreciating uncertainty over the extremes of either-or thinking (for instance, of knowing or not knowing, absolute or not absolute, successful or unsuccessful, and superior or inferior). By valuing unknowing, this dissertation does not devalue knowing. Rather, unknowing and knowing are situated as complementary forces integral to comical discourse.

The notion of the comical as a humbling force parallels some aspects of comic catharsis. In *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*, Lane Cooper says comedy relieves anger and envy by allowing for a healthy release of such emotions, referring to the allopathic versus homeopathic curative (re-balancing) procedures of art:

> the cure wrought by comedy is not, like the cure affected by tragedy, homeopathic, but, on the contrary, is allopathic. The generalized emotions of pity and fear in a tragic poem are a specific for the pity and fear of the individual in the audience; whereas anger and envy in the individual may be removed by something very unlike them in comedy. The comic poet may represent irascible and envious men, but will not necessarily do so; he may choose other types, as the ironical man, the braggart, and the buffoon. To this we might answer that, comedy being in many ways the reverse of tragedy, its effect may well be allopathic rather than homeopathic. The comic catharsis may be more direct, and more violent, too, than the tragic. (67)

Like tragedy, since comedy may cure by evoking the same feeling, comedy can be homeopathic. Tragedies alleviate pity and fear by providing a safe forum for spectators to experience, and thus purge pity and fear. Comedy may do the same for anger and envy in either an allopathic (via silly, happy, or playful depictions) or homeopathic (via expressions of comic anger and targeting) manner. This is fitting for comic nescience, which allows the comic to have differing effects, depending upon the type of comedy. Moreover, because readers and spectators have different senses of humour and preferences, from the perspective of comic nescience, the same comical text or performance may have an allopathic effect on some, and a homeopathic effect on others. An allopathic or homeopathic effect may vary even for an individual, when one considers the mood of the spectator. In one mood, a joke may have an allopathic effect, but in another mood, the same joke may have more of a homeopathic effect on the same spectator.

Just as a joke rests upon a surprise twist, thwarting the listener's pattern-seeking reading, the selected comic texts are assumed to be, at least in part, playful challenges to confident certainty. The basis of a standard joke is a twist, a surprise that thwarts expectation, undermining causation in some instances, but in other instances, correlation, or even joke structure itself. For an example of reflexive joking, a children's joke begins: "Why did the chicken cross the road?" The comic answer is "To get to the other side." Such a commonplace joke plays with joke expectation itself; instead of providing a surprise twist, the joke provides a literal and commonsensical response.[18] A surprise twist undermines expectation, that confident sense of knowing that is provided by logic, sense-making, and pattern-seeking (such as anticipating a surprise twist). The listener and the teller play (to varying degrees) their parts in the joke process, a process of non-bona-fide communication.[19] Because joke telling and joke listening is a knowable, pattern-based communicative relationship, overall, there is little uncertainty involved during non-bona-fide communication. Unlike bona-fide communication, which is direct and clear in intent and purpose, non-bona-fide communication is indirect, unclear, and deliberately uncertain (but artificially so) in terms of intent and purpose. However, acknowledging uncertainty in joking is a matter of emphasis; nescience is one viewpoint for understanding comic art.[20] Moreover, acknowledging uncertainty does not cancel out the more certain aspect of comical discourse; rather, comic nescience hopes that by acknowledging uncertainty and unknowing, the dynamic tension between opposing aspects (certainty and uncertainty, knowing and unknowing, intellect and emotion, superiority and inferiority) is appreciated. In other words, comic nescience hopes to qualify the study of humour, to nuance theoretical discourse that privileges one element over another (for instance, a superiority theorist's stress on aggression versus a relief theorist's stress on play), in favour of an active dynamic between elements.

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[18] This joke is commonsensical, at least, in terms of an imaginative world where chickens cross streets.

[19] In *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*, according to Victor Raskin joke telling is non-bona-fide communication in contrast with H. Paul Grice's notion of bona-fide communication. In "Logic and Conversation," Grice speaks of conversational implicatures, where he outlines four maxims of conversation. Although joking is termed non-bona-fide communication by Raskin, Grice's cooperative principle is adopted by Raskin in a fashion that parallels Grice's four maxims of bona-fide communication, involving the four maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner.

[20] Some people may not know a joke's punch line; they may anticipate it incorrectly; or, they may simply want to play the role of the unknowing listener -- (perhaps to appreciate the performance of the joke). Whatever the case, just as a viewer of a horror film may anticipate but still enjoy being scared, a viewer of

Since intelligence and agency are valued traits in western culture, this dissertation argues there is a popular conception of success that upholds the notion that intelligence and ability lead to success, while a lack of such qualities result in failure. In addition, this dissertation argues that comic texts offer a nescient alternative to the popular imagination's tradition of confidence fuelled by success, knowledge, agency, and power. Maybe the world is ultimately knowable, maybe there is an absolute knowledge, and maybe Thurber's professors have accessed it. Maybe the world is ultimately unknowable, there is no absolute knowledge, and Thurber's professors seem more capable only because they have been around longer than Thurber has been. Either way, musings that search for an ultimate answer are unanswerable, or if such musing are answered, positively or negatively, the answers point to a confident certainty that is at odds with this study's reading of the comic unexpected. Comic nescience challenges the simplistic certainty of knowledgeable agency that identifies success, power, and comprehension in western society, especially as upheld by heroic and scholarly personae.

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a spy novel may anticipate but still enjoy the mystery, or a scholar may anticipate but still delight in an academic article's critical debate, the comic demonstrates some level of uncertainty that is worth exploring.

Centrally then, this dissertation tackles issues that can be formulated into the following question: how and why do humorous texts utilize ambiguity, uncertainty, and multiplicity in those works that comically interrogate the success and esteem of heroic and scholarly manifestations of confident cognizant agency and does such an investigation and the overall articulation of comic nescience add to humour theory?[21]

Introduction II: The Value of Pursuing Comic Nescience

Establishing comic nescience as a theoretical perspective provides an opportunity to view a parallel between superiority/hostility theory and the wider cultural attitudes favouring a hierarchy of the successful over the unsuccessful, through a value of cognizant agency and a critique of foolishness (stupidity, laziness, and so on). Acknowledging the nescient quality of the comic allows for a shift in the traditional debate that pits superiority theory, release theory, and incongruity theory against one another, in favour of recognizing the overlapping qualities of each theory. Comic nescience shifts focus towards the dynamic of aspects (intelligence, emotion, and so on) used to describe humorous phenomena, as opposed to the ultimate dominance of one aspect over another. Along with offering revised theoretical paths for humour studies by qualifying key ideas in humour theory, comic nescience nuances traditional conceptions of success and status. Exploring success through the lens of comic nescience complicates causal equations linking ability with success and the lack of ability with failure. More than presenting comic targets that require re-balancing, from the perspective of comic nescience, comic figures, such as Thurber in "University Days," are calling for a balanced and humble view of success and failure, or intelligence and stupidity. Thurber (and others investigated) provide an alternative to the primarily derogatory conceptions of the comic target.

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[21] Admittedly, due to the ambitiousness of this thesis, it is difficult to formulate one simple question. In addition, due to the nature of questions, any one question may lead to several different, but equally valid, answers. Nevertheless, the articulation of a central question may help readers if only as a rhetorical device that aids in organizing the presentation of the thesis to the reader.

As a counter to the claim that comic nescience identifies ambiguity (amongst other related qualities) in comic art, it can be argued that all artistic texts demonstrate multiple meanings, especially if one acknowledges twentieth-century scholarly insights into ambiguity, the complicated function of audience interpretation, and Tony Bennett and Janet Woollacott's "inter-textuality."[22] In his landmark 1930 study *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, William Empson uses ambiguity in its extended sense, defining it as "any verbal nuance, however slight, which gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece of language" (1). Empson admits ambiguity is a difficult concept to define and illustrate, but nonetheless offers a working taxonomy of seven types of ambiguity. Empson's linguistic ambiguity relates to the work of teacher and student pair, Zellig Sabbetai Harris and Noam Chomsky, with the latter directly influencing Victor Raskin's script-based semantic theory. In *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*, Raskin claims:

> Many jokes contain an element which triggers the switch from the one script evoked by the text of the joke to the opposed script, the switch which makes up the joke. This element, called here the **semantic script-switch trigger**, or simply the **trigger**, usually belongs in simple jokes, to either of the two types: **ambiguity** or **contradiction**. (114)

For Raskin, jokes pivot on ambiguity or contradiction, a shift created by a joke's trigger, altering expected meaning to something unclear or contrary. Extending the linguistic ambiguity of Empson and the ambiguity/contradiction approach of Raskin to other media (film, television, internet video, and stand up comedy) implies greater instances of ambiguity demonstrable through visual gestures, vocal intonation, and performance.[23] Taking into account how different cultural moods, tastes, and contexts may lead to interpretive ambiguity, Empson's lucid taxonomy becomes more complicated. In any case, Empson's claim that poets pursue ambiguous expression can extend to comedians and their works, or different types of artists and their art; ambiguity is not limited to the production or reception of humorous texts. In terms of reception, from the perspective of British Cultural Studies, audience members are active meaning-makers, with divergent perspectives of the same text. Charlotte Brunsdon and David Morley in *Everyday Television* and Morley, more concretely in *The 'Nationwide' Audience*, demonstrate how spectators may understand the same text in opposing ways.[24] As Graeme Turner puts it in *British Cultural Studies*, from the perspective of cultural studies, because textual meanings are inseparable from their cultural use, the social, cultural, and political context of the interpreting audience, "Texts are social formations" (96). Bennett and Woollacott coin the term "inter-textuality." Referring to Bennett and Woollacott's *Bond and Beyond* in *British Cultural Studies*, Turner explains "inter-textuality" in the following way:

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[22] Bennett and Woollacott's "inter-textuality" is not to be confused with Kristeva's intertextuality. Bennett and Woolacott's "inter-textuality" acknowledges a relationship between a text and its social conditions.

> Bennett and Woollacott insist that texts cannot relate even to each other independently of specific social conditions and the meanings they put into circulation. The term *inter-*

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[23] While Empson's interest is poetry, Raskin's is simple jokes.

[24] Moreover, in *The 'Nationwide' Audience*, Morley undermines the notion that a text produces a particular and relatively uniform subject position. In *British Cultural Studies*, Graeme Turner explains: "The results conclusively undermine the linkage of particular readings with particular class positions (as if the working classes all read one way and the middle classes all read another); they also reveal that making sense of television is an intensely social and interactive activity. Given the diversity of response Morley collected in the *Nationwide* study, it was difficult to see how the text could produce a subject position that overrode those produced by other social forces such as gender, ethnicity, occupation and so on. It was also clear, however, that the subject positions produced by these other social forces were also unpredictable, disunited and even internally contradictory (89).

> *textuality* forces analysis to move continually between the text and the social conditions that frame its consumption, and limits textual interpretations to specific historical locations. (101)

Turner is careful to clarify: "This is not to suggest that texts are absolutely relative and bear no determining characteristics at all, but to emphasize the fact that texts do not simply contain set meanings they will generate willy-nilly, no matter what the conditions of their reception" (102). Nonetheless, the sociological interest of British Cultural Studies sees meaning as a living organism that may contain some consistencies and several inconsistencies for varying audiences. Although without direct sociological research, this dissertation's acknowledgment of ambiguity in comic texts is sympathetic to the British Cultural Studies perspective of textual interpretation.[25]

When one considers the exclusivity between the traditional streams of humour theory, then one becomes aware of the value of articulating the multiplicity of comical texts. In the 2000 *Communication Theory* article, "Humor as a Double-Edged Sword," John C. Meyer describes the problem of the history of humour theory as one of totality and exclusivity; each major theory claims to fully explain all instances of humour, thus dismissing or explicitly arguing in opposition to competing theories (300-315). Such a curious tendency exists even when many major theorists (such as E. B. White, Henri Bergson, Sigmund Freud) acknowledge or demonstrate, through their use of multiple approaches (Plato and Aristotle), that humour is a complicated phenomenon with multiple, overlapping, and contradictory elements. If there is an element of comical texts that is elusive, that is marked by contradiction, or that leads to multiple interpretations, then it is worthwhile to introduce a term, comic nescience, that helps to explicitly identify such an element as crucial to humour discourse. With his interest in rhetoric, Meyer implies that although ambiguity can be pursued, artists have an ability to control the slant of their humour, leading to one type of response over another. While comic nescience admits that comedians can foster ambiguity and slant their humour for particular effects, comic nescience also acknowledges that comedians do not have total control over the interpretations, impact, or lack of impact, of their work over all audiences across time and cultures – although comedians may repeatedly arouse such audiences to laughter.

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[25] Summarizing Bennet and Woolacott's view, in *British Cultural Studies*, Turner declares: "Bennett and Woollacott argue for a more genuine balance: for the recognition that texts, readers and readings are culturally produced and that one should examine their formation as a complex set of negotiations and interrelations" (103). Not only are texts, readers, and reading culturally produced, but, so are academic interpretations. This is especially significant as it relates to the study of comical texts, because there is a disparity between the status of the academic (high and serious) and the status of comic art (low and non-serious). Paralleling difficulties with the entry of film, television, and media studies into academia, comedy may have been experiencing a comparable difficulty for the bulk of its academic history.

In summary of this second introductory section, the value of pursuing comic nescience is one of organization, relationship articulation, and qualification. The tradition of humour theory is full of insight, but debates between theoretical schools tend to emphasize exclusive differences, rather than overlapping similarities. As a result, comic nescience may serve to organize such overlapping elements in a way that lends value to both the complexity of humour theory and the complexity of comical phenomena. Each theoretical school may stress one aspect of comical phenomena in the interest of challenging an opposing perspective, but comical phenomena are complex enough to include a variety of elements. Hence, comic nescience can articulate the very relationship between opposing forces that each theory treats in a more solitary manner. At times, humour theory tends towards sweeping claims; comic nescience can help to qualify some of these claims. Finally, the comic interrogation of the hero and the scholar is valuable, because it nuances the cultural understanding of success and prestige.

Introduction III: Method of Analyzing Comic Theory and Texts

Taking a non-exclusive non-totalizing theoretical approach, while preserving the less serious elements in understanding comic works, through an interdisciplinary investigation, helps articulate comic nescience. Identifying comic nescience as a means to understand humour may prove especially useful within an interdisciplinary exploration, where comedy, parody, and satire have more permeable definitional boundaries than, for instance, within only a literary framework. In terms of its genesis and influences, comic theory is multidisciplinary, mixing ideas from philosophy, psychology, classics, and the study of literature and mass media. However, in terms of its application, comic theory tends to restrict itself within a particular field, such as literary studies or media studies. While some restrictions are useful in terms of erecting a necessary academic turf to enable careful and detailed examinations, a complete separation of the unique developments within differing fields may be less useful than sharing across disciplines. Comic genres cross mediums, appearing in poetry, prose, performance, and popular culture. Comic delivery and reception also vary widely, because of the differing styles of humorists and because of the pluralistic quality of audiences that can lead to a wide range of interpretive responses. This dissertation respects the notion that comic texts across time and culture may bear similarities to one another; similarly, this dissertation respects the possibility that explanations of why we laugh may not be too different across history and through different societies – at least in some ways. In parallel, this dissertation admits that interpretations and theoretical explanations change across time and culture; different contexts and different people create and respond to humour in differing ways. Even a single moment of comic delivery within a homogenous community may yield differing audience responses and critical interpretations. In other words, this dissertation acknowledges that understanding humour is no easy task; rather, this is a journey demanding careful steps.

The thesis consists of two halves. The first half includes the introduction, background information, review of comic theory, and the statement of the main areas of research and analytical interest. The second half develops comic nescience through the following chapters: "Comic Nescience," "The Western Mythos of Success," and "Serious Intellect." Rounding out the introduction, the next four pages will outline each chapter.

Chapter four, "Comic Nescience," offers a guiding perspective for understanding the legacy of humour theory and interpreting American comical texts, proceeding in five subsections. In the first subsection, like John C. Meyer in "Humor as a Double-Edged Sword," comic nescience moves away from siding with one camp in the three traditional humour theory categories. Overcoming the exclusivity and totalizing tendencies of superiority theory, play theory, and incongruity theory, comic nescience offers a more inclusive and co-operative method of investigating an admittedly complicated phenomenon. Rather than one or the other, comical works can be viewed as both ridiculous and ludicrous, or as a dynamic range of superimposed possibilities. An alternative to the categorical and definitional debates by scholars such as Alexander Leggatt and Andrew Stott over comedy, Margaret Rose, Judith Butler, Linda Hutcheon, and Fredric Jameson over parody, and Wayne Booth and Claire Colebrook over irony, comic nescience emphasizes the possibility for complex comical texts to offer multiple readings and overlapping categorization. Moving beyond the hierarchy between comical categories (such as comedy, parody, and satire) that are partly related to class bias, comic nescience values the way comedy, parody, and satire are worthy artistic avenues. By identifying the dynamic between understanding/misunderstanding and serious/unserious, comic nescience acknowledges the risk element in generating laughter.

In chapter four's second subsection, comic nescience accepts the value of historical debates between the ridiculous and ludicrous, as well as the related class-based hierarchical distinction between humour and wit. Surveying the humour and wit relationship through Daniel Wickberg's *Sense of Humor* and Jerry Palmer's *Taking Humour Seriously*, this subsection leads towards the insights of Pierre Bourdieu, John Fiske, and Henry Jenkins, regarding popular culture's complication of the high versus low distinction in artistic reception.

In the third subsection, comic nescience makes the following claim: some comical texts and performances are best characterized by a range of active elements, which includes an overlapping tension between the logical and illogical, the intellectual and the emotional, and the *alazôn* and *eirôn*. Stressing George Meredith's and Molière's view of comedy as a logical curative, this section refers to Haberland's counter against the ability for comedy to reform humans, in favour of comedy as a source of pleasure. In addition, while one may claim there are logical lessons behind a comical work, this dissertation offers the term argument to be more suitable. Arthur Asa Berger's distinction between the *alazôn* and *eirôn* is a starting point for complicating a distinction between buffoon and trickster.

The fourth subsection of chapter four qualifies superiority theory. While Jeroen Vandaele in "Humor Mechanisms" argues that jokes ultimately affirm the superior intelligence of the listener and teller, comic nescience believes such claims are exaggerations. Joke structure is relatively simple, taking little time to master, as is evident by the prevalence of jokes and joking in social discourse, e-mail lists, and bathroom walls. In addition, many jokes have a structure open to alternate targets, easily making the superior listener into an inferior target. In this way, comic nescience claims comical discourse is more about a relationship between knowing and unknowing, where although unknowing may at times be a signal of ridicule and ignorance or of ludicrous playfulness, the unknowing dynamic may also be a source of wisdom.

In chapter four's fifth subsection, America is a pluralistic utopian comedy. Agreeing with Joseph Boskin in *Rebellious Laughter*, because the American people are unified in some ways, but are also culturally diverse, some humour may function in a more uniform way, while other humour may function in a less uniform manner. Sustaining the Aristotelian tension between idealism and realism in comedy, but adapting the tension for an American context, America itself is an ideal. As identified by Thomas R. Dye and Harmon L. Ziegler, as well as James E. Combs and Dan Nimmo, democracy functions because of an elite interested in upholding democratic values. Because of this, those with prestige and power in American culture, such as heroes and scholars, become very important sites of tension between the ideal and practice. "Comic Nescience" closes by offering a new vision of the strict comedic ending in the American tradition. In this study, the notion of the happy-ending in comedy alters to signify the ideal comical works address in their interrogation of the gap between ideal and practice. Being an ideal and because humans tends to foul things up, the happy ending is a vision that can never be reached in the absolute sense, but the ideal, nonetheless, is worth striving for.

Chapter five, “The Western Mythos of Success,” through three main areas, explores the popular notions of success and failure as oppositional states that stem from the agency or lack of agency of the individual. The first area examines linguistic exclusivity, pointing out how terms such as success and failure, winner and loser, fail to capture the complexity and contradictions of either experience, especially because of a lack of acknowledging factors beyond causal agency, as comically countered by *Don Quixote* and *The Gold Rush*. A dialectic between thought and language (from Frye’s identification of a dialectic between grammar and logic in *Anatomy of Criticism*) helps explain the gap between a term’s formal definition and experience.

Chapter five’s second area examines the cultural impact of Horatio Alger and Puritan standards, forwarding a popular conception of the Alger equation of success. Despite the simplistic popular conception, Alger’s stories include patronage and chance. In addition, moving the frontier concept to an urban space characterizes an uplifting vision of possibility for the industrious individual. Benjamin Franklin is examined as an embodiment of the successful intellectual persona. However, by the end of the subsection, through Will Kaufman’s concept of “irony fatigue” (from *The Comedian as Confidence Man*), Franklin will also be addressed as an ironic personality, which hints at the possibility of interpreting his self-made stories and advice in a more ambiguous fashion than as a role model for Alger’s American. Washington Irving’s *Rip Van Winkle* can either uphold the values of hard work or subvert them, presenting a vision of the idle rich. Then, the issue of prestige and persona meet again in *Huck Finn*.

Chapter five's third area focuses primarily on the factor of race in the American tradition. However, it begins outside of the United States, with *Robinson Crusoe*, exploring the issue of the ethnic sidekick in American culture, largely through an analysis by Frederick Zackel. Bill Cosby's "The Lone Ranger" routine isa playful criticism of racial hierarchy in the cowboy and Native American partner relationship. This section concludes through an investigation of how race and humour intersect in *Huck Finn*, with a special focus on Pap's rant and the use of the term *nigger*. Highlighting a debate about the value of *Huck Finn*, this subsection argues that disputed ideas around *Huck Finn* illustrate how comical texts may lead to fundamental opposed, but warranted, readings. *Huck Finn* is a combination of artistic elements and a mix of various comical categories, lending itself to the view of comic nescience.

Chapter six, "Serious Intellect" proceeds in three stages. The first stage identifies the cultural value of intellect, noting how popular culture values and rewards intellectual prowess. Heywood Broun's "The Fifty-First Dragon" is a unique mix of heroism and education, through Gawaine's attempt to become a good student/dragon-slayer. Multiple interpretations will reveal how Gawaine is open to several comical possibilities, in line with the view of comic nescience. In addition, Gawaine's climactic end may serve as a criticism of the successful individual's cultural worth. Through Polly Espy and the narrator, Max Shulman's "Love is a Fallacy" presents an extended dialogue between student and teacher, female and male, pursued and pursuer. While Polly is the comic idiot throughout the text, and even though the narrator cunningly persuades his roommate in the beginning, by the end, Polly outwits the narrator, who finally appears as a braggart.

The second stage of chapter six displays the academic as an authority. Through Thurber's "University Days," the artificial hierarchy established by a distinction between the more and less knowledgeable is explored. In addition, through various characters, the issue of class complicating the elitist image desired by the university is addressed. In "University Days," the lowly comic targets, the stupid and the non-elite, also garner sympathy. "University Days" hints at an alternative to the idea of the intellectual genius. Rather than simply being someone with greater capability, greater work ethic, or greater innate talent, intellectual success also involves playing the part of an elite intellectual.

Chapter six's third stage unveils the performance of the expert academic. Before moving directly into the style of the intellectual persona, the issues of parodic duality, the intellectual as serious, and Plato's resistance to the comical are briefly addressed. An analysis of "Paradoxical Persona," a parodic academic essay by Frederick Crews, demonstrates how academic writing is at once an analysis and a means for prestigious association (with other critics) and an avenue for self-promotion. The curtains fall on this chapter's stage with the notion of complexity in the realm of education, especially in terms of how the idea of complexity feeds into the image of the prestigious and capable professor.

Before proceeding, some mention needs to be made of this thesis's style and tone, which is generally serious, but the thesis includes some – hopefully – humorous digressions. That is, overall, the thesis is a serious analysis, but, at times, the thesis includes moments of light-heartedness. In part, these minor interruptions should help illustrate how deep-seated our biases against the comical are; in addition, such digressions are included to both illustrate and embody how seriousness and the comical are not necessarily exclusive concepts. The comical digressions may be jarring for the reader's typical process of digesting academic material.[26] However, for this thesis, both in terms of its serious argument, and, at times, its lighter tone or commentary, seriousness and non-seriousness are not necessarily mutually exclusive (emotional, academic, or artistic) states or clearly distinct concepts.

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[26] The very phrasing of this paragraph illustrates how difficult it is to express serious analysis and comical non-seriousness as something more than opposing and exclusive phenomena. Academic theses tend to foster a particular image of seriousness, intellect, quality, and, by implication, depth. Through an inclusion of imbedded comical digressions, this thesis believes our experience of seriousness and un-seriousness, like comical art, embodies some level of ambiguity. In a minor way, the comical digressions sprinkled throughout the thesis aim to comically defamiliarize the typical experience of engaging with a scholarly thesis. The thesis may prove to be discomforting for some readers accustomed to a thoroughly and consistently serious and un-reflexive academic tone, but, because of its inclusion of comical comments, the thesis urges readers to reflect upon how and why comical digressions or critiques of academic style may be discomforting. The reader's uncertain state and corresponding desire to know the intent of a comical digression may help illustrate how we are highly invested in positions of comfortable and oriented knowing.

Chapter One: Background Information

> laughs have the structure of "ha-ha-ha" or "ho-ho-ho,"
> but not "ha-ho-ha-ho."
> Robert Provine, "Laughter," 39[27]

Introduction to Background Information

Being an interdisciplinary study of the comic treatment of the hero and the scholar, to lay a beginning foundation of ideas and approach, this section needs to cover five background areas. As a contribution to comic theory, first some mention will be made of the emerging field of Humorology. Two, because this study pairs literature and film, this section will explore one element of film analyses (the emphasis on director as author), to better navigate the differences and the kinship of the two media. Three, because the parody of academic writing is not a typical topic of analysis, except through academic novels, this section explains this study's inclusion of the parody of academic scholarship. Four, this chapter addresses the difficulty of establishing distinct comic categories. Five, the "Background Information" explains the difficulty of identifying a clear national identity with popular culture figures (for instance, considering James Bond as an icon beyond Britain).

I. A. Humorology

At the risk of sounding like a new-age cult, à la Numerology, Humorology is a new interdisciplinary field, according to Mahadev L. Apte, who calls for its independent status as a branch of research. The International Society for Humor Studies (ISHS) is an organization Apte and other leading researchers (Victor Raskin, Salvatore Attardo, Amy Carrell, Andrew Stott, and John Morrell) are linked to, according to Amy Carrell, "the only academic journal devoted entirely to humor scholarship" (http://www.uni-duesseldorf.de/WWW/MathNat/Ruch/PSY356-Webarticles/Historical_Views.pdf). Because current humanities-based analyses tend to gravitate around a handful of key theorists (Freud, Bergson, and Bakhtin especially), and because comic theory tends to be concerned with the definition and scope of the various comic categories (comedy, parody, and irony), literary studies and film/broadcast media studies can be augmented by the interdisciplinary lead of humorologists. Coming from a wide variety of fields, humorologists are merging traditional literary studies with anthropology, sociology, psychology, philosophy, and linguistics in ways that try to expand the canonical theory of Freud, Bergson, and Bakhtin. While traditionally, comic theory in literary and media studies has borrowed from all of these fields, the difference with humorology is one of intent; humorologists from differing research backgrounds and foci aim to eventually develop an interdisciplinary understanding of humour, which for the humorologist refers to a wider and more diverse phenomenon than, for instance, Renaissance theory in literature. While the state of humorology is far from being unified, the existence of the ISHS is one major and relatively recent (mid-1980s) academic step towards organizing humour research from different fields in a way that may allow for some organized sharing of insights, concepts, and methods.

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[27] From the 1996 *American Scientist* article.

I. B. The Author: Film, Literature, and Interdisciplinarity

A convention in cinema studies and the popular reception of film refers to a film as the product of its director. In academia, this convention is a remnant of the mid-twentieth century resistance to the interdisciplinary nature of film, because of the attempt to distinguish the study of film from other fields and because of the desire to establish film as art.[28] Even though cinema now favours several different approaches, the legacy of the auteur approach persists in the way books and articles analyzing cinema identify the work or works studied to a singular director. While a relatively new discipline such as film studies may have a desire, and at times an obsession, to distinguish itself from traditional academic categories, usually by emphasizing the visual nature of celluloid projections, it is a mistake to see film as wholly distinct from broadcast media studies or literature. Indeed, to indicate only a handful of overlapping artistic areas, film incorporates elements of drama, music, stage design, costuming, lighting, photography, and advertising – making film an explicitly interdisciplinary artistic business. Thinking of cinema in terms which were useful during the mid to late fifties, when the auteur approach in France spread so as to bring greater respect for cinematic art, may be convenient; but, unfortunately, the auteur habit ignores the facts of contemporary mainstream film production.

Because the auteur approach established the director as an artist, by associating a director's profession with that of a great painter or author, certain films could be emphasized as the genius of a great visionary. Oddly enough, the approach to distinguish film from other disciplines and lend credence to film art is itself a traditional literary approach, in that a single author is applauded as the voice behind a text that needs to be critically recognized and appreciated – the director as creative genius.[29] As a result, a great many books on cinema are organized by the genius behind the machine; such works help sustain both the academic and the popular view that cinema is the product of a singular and dominating guiding voice. While some directors may wield such power, even the most powerful directors do not work alone. Film art is collaborative. In the business hierarchy of mainstream cinematic production, in fact, it is the producer who wields the most power, bringing together the financial backing, the director, the key actors, and other key artists, such as the cinematographer, editor, and of course, script writers.[30] A star director may work on a series of films with a certain core team, such as a writer, director, producer, and bankable performer, as was the case with the following example. In 2001, screenplay writer Akiva Goldsman (adapting the book by Sylvia Nasar), director Ron Howard, producers Brian Grazer and Todd Hallowel, and star Russell Crowe team up for *A Beautiful Mind.* In 2005, with the primary writing credits to Cliff Hollingsworth, the team of Akiva Goldsman, Howard, Grazer, Hallowel, and Crowe also create *Cinderella Man.* In 2006, Akiva Goldsman, Brian Grazer, Todd Hallowel, Ron Howard, and Tom Hanks (who collaborated with Howard's earlier films *Splash*) team up to bring Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* to the big screen.[31] Despite the temptation, it is inaccurate to refer to these texts as exclusively the director's films.

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[28] The French New Wave and their signature journal *Cahiers du Cinéma* helped establish the film director as the sole author of a film. While some directors may have great control over their product, technicians, musicians, cinematographers, writers, and actors all contribute something important. Hence, film is collaborative, even for those directors with final decision-making powers.

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[29] Many of the theoretical approaches in film analysis are related to theoretical tendencies in other disciplines.

[30] A film project may be approved without a script, but such instances are rare. Films are hardly ever produced until a quality script is approved. Rarely, for instance, as in the infamous case of *Apocalypse Now*, is a quality script is delivered in trust by creators with a proven record of past performance. Even in the case of *Apocolypse Now* however, the film was based upon Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and was populated with stars of the time, including director Francis Ford Coppola, and stars Marlon Brando, Martin Sheen, Dennis Hopper, and Robert Duvall. In addition, during the 1970s, there was a desire to capitalize on the counter-cultural antagonism towards the Vietnam War.

Regardless of the varied reality of a director's role, film studies, even when paired with ideological approaches, psychoanalysis, genre studies, or many other approaches, informally clings to a director-centred approach, overlooking, the interdisciplinary links of cinema and the collaborative nature of film production. In part, such a popular and critical tendency may be due to the western individualist worldview that inherits a Romantic conception of the lone artist, privileging the lone visionary. The nature of cinema production may be too cooperative for a society that highlights the efforts of a great leader over the notion of a collective collaboration. Certainly, some directors are more dictatorial than others, and indeed some directors are better managers than others, but there is an important gap between even those instances and the cultural habit to refer to a film as the product of a single voice. Very simply, the industrial reality of mainstream filmmaking does not currently support the possibility of lone film creation.

Despite this difference from literature, where quite often, a lone author is the primary source of his or her work, cinema has significant, if somewhat overlooked, connections with other arts, such as painting and literature. For instance, the foundations of mainstream cinematic principles date back to at least the Renaissance, where ideas about perspective helped to create the illusion of three-dimensional space on a two-dimensional canvas.[32] In addition, many mainstream films have been tested in other, more literary fields, such as popular or classical novels, dramas, short stories, epics, comic books, and so on. Films are often adapted by or are original products of professional screenwriters, with some writers, such as William Goldman, Neil Simon, and Charlie Kaufman wielding a great deal of power at different times in their career. On that note, the variance of creative power in Hollywood is another factor that limits the role of the director as the sole artist, for even star directors have greater or lesser power on differing projects. Professional actors, some with a great deal of power, may also insist upon including their own vision in the process. Allowing film studies to acknowledge its links to literature and other fields is a more appropriate means of

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[31] Paul Bettany plays Silas in *The Da Vinci Code* and working with the core Ron Howard and Brian Grazer team, played Charles in *A Beautiful Mind*. Along with high-profile actors, production teams may also repeatedly work with an entire crew in different areas (such as make-up, costuming, special effects, and so on).

[32] That is, the Renaissance stress on capturing reality in an objective manner relates to the early marvel of photography for "capturing" the observable world in a manner more or less akin to how individual view the world (minus the colour, initially). The early impulse of cinema as a medium of moving pictures that

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faithfully recorded reality is evident in the early popularity of documentary cinema, where little else sustained viewer interest than the spectacle of watching pictures move. Certainly, early documentary cinema relied on narrative at times (for instance, quite possibly the first comic narrative film, the Lumière Brothers' "The Waterer Watered"), as well as striking compositions and the use of exotic locales and subjects. However, cinema was not always the fictional domain that urged viewers to suspend their disbelief and become lost in the verisimilitude of the story realm for an hour and a half. In *Narrative*, Paul Cobley explains: "It must be remembered that early audiences went to see machines demonstrated rather than watch films (Gunning 1990a: 58). The film historian, Barry Salt, suggests: "The only absolute demand from audiences was that films be photographed (and printed) sharply in focus and with the correct exposure" (1990: 31-2). Film was a new technology for recording and reproducing moments in time and space rather than a medium for narrative" (154). Early in the emergence of cinema then, there are at least two notions of cinematic realism, one the cinematographic capability to capture lived experience, and two, the fictional realism that Hollywood narratives that specifically exploits film's ability to document historical reality, but in the service of storytelling. In the *Film Journal* article "Tremble of Truth," Hunter Vaughan points out how there are many "realisms," referring to Derrida to ask, "Shouldn't we hold with Derrida on this point: genre exists only for its own negation, only to set limits that will be breached-that law must exist for it to be subverted" (http://www.thefilmjournal.com/issue9/dogme95.html). The attempt to define realism as a clear and singular artistic concept in cinema of course can and has been breached by not only experimental efforts (where the defamiliarization of standardized conventions is most clear) to question classical cinematic verisimilitude, but also through alternative movements that claim a greater sense of realism. Taking a psychoanalytic and semiotic perspective, Vaughan makes the standard claim that classical cinema creates a coherent story realm which ensnares the viewer: "From eye-line matches to cross-cutting, these compose the method through which cinema learned to suture itself into its final product, how to mask its own presence beneath certain conventions of denotation based on spatial-temporal verisimilitude to nature. Though this forged still-dominant conventions of cinematic language, the development of film technology and theory would challenge this code with alternate "realisms" and, eventually, reveal the ideological ramifications of any such code. From the grim socialist stages of Soviet Realism, to the kitchen-sink grittiness of John Grierson's Depression-era documentaries, to the portable-camera realisms of Italian Neo-Realism and Cinéma-Vérité, to the works of Dogme 95, these codes of realism were each embedded with unique ideological thrusts, and their fate would be the paradox existing between film and reality" (http://www.thefilmjournal.com/issue9/dogme95.html).

understanding the factual reality of film production, than simply relying upon the convenience of a director-centred film-focused approach.

An immediate working solution to such a tendency is to refer to the title of the film itself, instead of including the director: so, *Groundhog Day*, instead of Harold Ramis's *Groundhog Day*. If the analysis emphasizes the director or key actor or if the analysis needs to distinguish itself from other versions, then a lead-in qualifier would be appropriate, as in Bill Murray's *Groundhog Day*. Altering the way the culture views cinema to be the product of one individual instead of as a collaborative effort may be an impossible task to remedy, in part because the convention is quite convenient and entrenched in the way individuals and scholars often refer to films. Nevertheless, when taking an interdisciplinary approach, it is important to acknowledge the difference between the comparatively singular working conditions of an author and the collective working conditions of a director.[33]

I. C. Including Academia

All joking aside, to include the scholar, as an esteemed figure, alongside the hero is an unusual association, for at least two reasons: the non-fictional and fictional divide, and contemporary stereotyping. If academics signify educators in general and if heroes signify great individuals performing risky behaviour, then academics are more closely aligned to the realm of everyday experience, while heroes tend to populate (usually amazing) narratives (based either on everyday life or imagined premises). That is, teachers are a part of the average individual's everyday experience, being a central part of the public and private educational system, whereas heroes are less a part of everyday experience in the same way. Average exposure to heroes includes depictions in literature, on television and film, or in video games.[34] In this way then, academics are more identifiable with non-fictional and average experience, while heroes are associated with the realm of narrative, especially popular fictions. Most popular American heroes do not give homework, administer examinations, or loom over students as intimidating judges of their competence. Related to this non-fictional and fictional divide, the hero alongside the scholar is an unusual association because of contemporary stereotypes surrounding the two. Contemporary stereotyping situates the two as opposites: for instance, there is the brawn versus the brain, or the jock versus the nerd. Heroes are people of action, while academics stuff themselves into the world of inaction, books. To use everyday parlance, heroes often must "act without thinking." Although thought never ceases, such a way of viewing the heroic reveals a stress on the brave individual's reliance on impulsive effort best suited for the moment – usually a high-risk and unusual moment. In contrast, academics "think without acting." Academics are walking libraries of information, but otherwise typified as unflattering examples of physical prowess and simple coordination. Their lives are stereotyped as much more stable, regular, and otherwise secure and perhaps even monotonous. Moreover, while heroic action often has an immediate practical purpose, the purpose of academic thought seems unclear and maybe even impractical. Hence, there is the comic type of the academic genius who knows nuclear physics and can recite the periodic table of elements in his or her sleep, but is unable to tie his or her own shoes without risking an asthma attack – perhaps the hacking cough origins of "aca" in academia. Beyond such stereotypes, the hero and the intellectual do meet, in non-fictional stories of great teachers (such as *Lean on Me*) or acts of bravery, or in fictional protagonists such as Sherlock Holmes, Indiana Jones, MacGyver, and in general, detectives.[35]

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[33] Changing how one speaks of cinema within academic analysis requires a shift in a habitual perspective. Producing books is also a collaborative business, but the difference between creating a film and a book is a matter of degree. The authorship of a book, downplaying inter-textual influences, stems largely from a singular writer and his or her editors. Producing a film is a much more collaborative and expensive endeavour than writing a book. Rather than literature, in terms of expense, mainstream film production may be more analogous to architecture or construction. To a certain degree, in terms of collaboration, architecture is also comparable to film. For instance, architectural teams often design buildings, with the crucial contribution of tradespersons specializing in specific areas. While an entrepreneur such as Donald Trump may fund and have his name on his buildings, it would be misleading to consider the building to be the sole product of Trump's artistic genius. Instead of sustaining an understanding of film production as comparable to authors penning their masterpieces, a more suitable analogy may be an architectural one.

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[34] The police, fire fighters, nurses, paramedics, and doctors are of course a vital and often heroic part of everyday experience, but they are not a regular part of the formative part of people's lives, unlike teachers, students, and academics. In part, what makes an individual heroic is impressive action in an unusual or high-risk situation. Of course, with a broader definition of heroism, then many professions (including teaching) and social roles (such as parenting) can be interpreted as heroic, in the loose sense of the word, or depending upon how much trouble one's students or kids are.

While the impulse here is not to traverse a non-fictional and fictional gap, or to traverse the gap between everyday experience and the narrative re-workings of life into accounts of heroism, the active and intimate relationship between the realms of non-fiction and fiction needs acknowledgement. The way humans perceive the world and the stories they tell about the world and themselves influence one another. In *Northrop Frye: The Theoretical Imagination*, Jonathan Hart explains: "For Frye, the story, and not the argument, is at the centre of literature and society. The base of society is mythical and narrative and not ideological and dialectical" (19). Narrating heroes, both fictional and non-fictional, tend to share certain characteristics. The fictional template of Horatio Algers can be and has been easily applied to non-fictional narratives, such as the football film *Rudy*, or the boxing film, *Cinderella Man*. Whether consciously or not, fictions may influence a culture's members to organize and narrate their memories or their most personal stories in particular ways.

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[35] *Lean on Me* epitomizes the powerful teacher's ability to alter the lives of his or her student and the surrounding community. In the film, principal Joe Clark cleans out the school's problems with drugs, gangs, and a general lack of interest in education for self-improvement.

In another manner, both heroes and academics are social creations. In the wider sense of the word, the prestigious image of a scholar is a type of creation. When the work of an academic circulates, it is not simply the work of a non-fictional individual; rather, it is the work of an academic persona, who establishes his or her image of intelligence through the embodiment of certain communicative markers in his or her written work. Such personae have remarkably similar patterns, evident in writing style, verbiage, mannerisms, dress, and so on, making appropriate raw material for parodies such as by Frederick Crews or by Jonathan Lithgow's professor in the television series *Third Rock from the Sun.*[36]

Whether fictional and/or non-fictional, by earnest effort and/or performed persona, both heroes and academics are considered valuable members of society, because they are perceived to embody confident cognizant agency. That is, despite the stereotypes surrounding the two, it would not be a shocking claim that in North America heroes and academics possess great physical and/or intellectual ability.[37] Looking at cognitive agency, one notices that the value afforded the hero in fiction is not too different from the longstanding cultural value given the educated elite. They both represent an ideal of intelligence, prowess, and success.

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[36] In *Third Rock from the Sun*, although Dr. Dick Solomon is highly knowledgeable of physics, being an alien, he is a mountebank of sorts, because he must adjust to life on earth. In a way, Lithgow's Solomon is a stock comic academic, being well versed in his field, but incapable of much else, learning as the television series progresses.

[37] This claim is not based upon sociological research. It is possible that the North American population does not believe in the ability of either heroes or intellectuals. However, from their esteemed social status, it is assumed that both heroes and intellectuals are believed to be successful agents of body and mind.

As it relates to success and the identification of prowess and ability, class and race are also important factors, because traditionally, only rich white North Americans could afford an education. To this day, primarily, the higher classes can most afford to attend top universities. Until recently, heroic feats on the athletic field were also restricted to the white upper class. Demonstrating confident cognizant agency can help one gain greater cultural prestige and respect. The self-promotion in contemporary gangsta rap demonstrates the importance of displaying one's prowess as it relates to upward mobility. Artists such as 50 Cent often rap about attaining a life of leisurely luxury and power, complete with the spoils of such success, including an indulgence in expensive alcohol and partying with beautiful women.[38] Gangsta rap is one glaring example of the North American love of social prestige. Demonstrations of status and prowess are links between the hero and the academic. These demonstrations do differ from a more typical definition of heroism, courageous acts in the face of risk.

Historically, especially as it relates to manliness, non-white, lower class soldiers desired to prove their worth as men by demonstrating bravery on the battlefield. Consider, for instance, the film *Glory*, which depicts a regiment of black American troops who wanted to prove their ability to fight for a belief, to eradicate slavery. For these troops, the opportunity to sacrifice themselves for a higher ideal was not only a chance to uphold a just principle, but also a means to demonstrate that heroic virtue was not restricted to the white upper class. In a racist and class-biased society, acts of bravery were loud declarations against inequality. Similarly, for some, educational achievement is a means of demonstrating one's ability; gaining an education can be a declaration against the biases of race and class that deems members of certain groups as incapable, lazy, cowardly, or unintelligent.[39] A central assumption of this study is that North American society views heroes and academics as capable, because they are believed to possess confident cognizant agency, an ability to successfully wield their bodies and their minds. Whether they wield their minds and bodies in self-interest or to uphold a principle, however, depends upon the hero and the academic, as well as a critic's interpretation of them.[40]

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[38] The title of one of 50 Cent's albums, *Get Rich or Die Tryin'* is a telling indicator of the emphasis on upward mobility at all costs. While the stress is on financial gain, violent posturing, and the successful pursuit of young women, gangsta rap may have a social message in its blatant machismo. The excessiveness of gangsta rap draws attention to how much of American popular culture depicts what gangsta rap does, but in a more subdued or disguised manner. The fact that many gangsta rappers are or have been gang members also points to a parallel in the legitimate business world. The cutthroat business world would not be averse to a credo such as "Get rich or die trying." Perhaps in some circles it would even be modified to "Get rich or die," or simply "Get rich!" Business success, violence, and misogyny also meet in the satire *American Psycho*, where the successful businessman becomes a psychopath.

During the writing of this thesis, the appropriately surnamed Harvey C. Mansfield published *Manliness*, where he also includes an association between confidence and prowess. Focusing particularly upon manly virtue, Mansfield claims manliness is "confidence in the face of risk" (23). This risk can be on the battlefield or in the realm of ideas. Hence, although difficult for the scholar, because academia affords security, it is possible for the hero and the academic to share the quality of upholding a principle.[41]

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[39] Equal access to public education and higher education were major concerns of the American Civil Rights Movement, symbolized by the Brown versus the Board of Education case, which itself consisted of five related cases, one of which was the Brown versus the Board case. Oliver et al. versus the Board of Education of Topeka (Kansas) et al., led by Charles H. Houston and then Thurgood Marshall challenged segregation in the school system, prompting the American school system to be a place of open and equal access, regardless of race, class, religion, or gender.

[40] The line between self-interest and principle is a blurry one, and may depend largely upon the degree of self-interest that is pursued and gained.

[41] The difficulty arises from the sense of comfort for many tenured academics. By definition, tenure cancels out risk. Originally, tenure could have protected the pursuit of ideas that have no result; that is, tenure could have been a means to encourage risk. For instance, someone could attempt to discover the cure for cancer, but after several genuine and courageous attempts be without a cure. With tenure, the academic could not be fired for such failure. However, North American academia may not foster risk-taking ideas or serious political actions, because tenure today seems to signal upward mobility (or financial success) more than a chance to pursue unpopular ideas that risk failure. In fact, as evident with the industry of academic publishing, academics do not promote themselves as risk-takers who may routinely fail, but as

Mansfield's interest is the history of ideas surrounding manly virtue, not the hero nor the scholar specifically; nevertheless, his equation of confidence plus risk is applicable to heroes and intellectuals. In terms of an ideal model, the hero risks his or her life for the sake of a greater belief, while the academic may challenge conventional ways of thinking through risky, unusual, and new ways of understanding an issue. Both then, can exhibit confidence in the face or risk. That is, they are willing to risk their reputations, security, and status, in order to push society further. For the academic, risky behaviour may involve a willingness to stand up against corrupt departmental politics, speaking out for the free exchange of ideas in a climate of dictatorial censorship, or refusing a deal that will guarantee self-serving security in order to fight for a greater good. For the academic, such virtue may include presenting ideas that are unpopular, or viewing one's subject in a new way, in the face of criticism or at the risk of appearing unintelligent, uncooperative, unprofessional, or even crazy. For Mansfield, the key is a combination of resilience in the face of risk, without the compromising politics of personal gain or the comfort of upholding the status quo. While it may be easier for an academic to adopt the (self-protective and current) standard (and style) of intelligence, for Mansfield, doing so would be shameful for the manly.

Building upon ancient Greek philosophical notions (especially from Plato and Aristotle) of manly virtue, Mansfield builds a case for the positive value of manliness, claiming manliness is a virtue embodied only by a few men and women. Reviving the

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competent and intelligent thinkers. Indeed, regular failure may deem one unintelligent and incapable. Voicing risky or unpopular ideas at conferences would also counter the persona of intelligence, a persona that needs approval from the greater academic community. The promise of tenure, course relief, sabbatical, and other paid leaves are temptations that may make some academics more content with self-promotion and financial security than with challenging the status quo in a manner which seriously risks their social and professional status. In regimes where the free exchange of ideas is a serious political threat, such as under Hitler or Stalin, then, those academics risking their lives, freedom, jobs, and reputation, in order to speak out for a principle would be manly in Mansfield's sense.

concept of *thumos* and *andreia*, Mansfield believes "assertiveness in the face of risk is a task of political responsibility" (221). Manliness defends people from tyrants, exhibits a preference for action over reflection, and "asks us to continually prove ourselves" (20). "Manliness is knowing how to be confident in situations where sufficient knowledge is not available" (21). Because of the stress on action and confidence (over reflection and knowledge), Mansfield's conception of manliness distinguishes the manly hero from the academic. In other words, because Mansfield is concerned with manly virtue, Mansfield does not accentuate the common quality of confident cognizant agency demonstrated by heroes and academics, as identified by this study's comic interrogation of confident cognizant agency. However, Mansfield does acknowledge differing and changing conceptions of manliness, which relate to the American individualist hero and the secure North American academic.

Along with the ideal of a hero and academic facing risk, another element of Mansfield's presentation that also relates to this study's use of a parallel between the hero and the academic is the Machiavellian man. For Mansfield, "Machiavelli's *animo* replaces the classical *thumos* and simplifies it. Whereas *thumos* tends to idealize itself and to offer sacrifice of the body, *thumos* defends to a higher goal, *animo* has no such paradoxical complication; it is a spirit that keeps its eye solely on the preservation of its own body" (230). Rather than battling tyranny, Machiavelli's conception seems to endorse the tyrant ruler disguised as a just ruler; Mansfield offers the following critique:

> With Machiavelli the modern idea of "security" was born, the very antithesis of manliness. Although he began by deploring the fact that manliness sat idle, he ended it by keeping it there. Machiavelli tried to simplify manliness so as to make it more effective. Manliness henceforth would be occupied with making humans more powerful rather

> than making them better. Machiavelli called this "prudence," but I have to say it was not wisdom. (231)

Machiavelli's advice for the use of fraud, instead of directness, turns manly virtue into a self-serving political strategy game that may have some application to some instances of American individualist heroism and perhaps even academia at its worst. For Mansfield, Machiavellian values prefer a rational control that is at odds with the ancient Greek conception of manly virtue: "Rational control prefers routine and doesn't like getting excited. Manliness is often an act of sacrifice against one's interest, hence concerned with honor and shame rather than money and calculation, to which rational control makes its appeal" (233). In certain American protagonists, such as the hired gun (William Munny in *Unforgiven*), bounty hunter (Han Solo in *Star Wars*), and mafia gangster (Michael Corleone in *The Godfather*) there seems to be a struggle between acting honourably and acting in a calculated manner for greater money and power.[42]

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[42] Even comic characters may use trickery for greater money and power, such as the confidence men in *Huckleberry Finn*. The difference however is that the comic con-person is often presented as a social victim (Huck and Jim) with a larger moral purpose, or as simply an idiot (Coyote) to be laughed at – and sometimes both (*Dumb and Dumber*). Folk tricksters such as Ashiepattle or Tom Thumb may be smaller than the average individual and thus need to rely upon their wits to survive. In addition, their trickery may be directed against the rich, the powerful, the corrupt, and the abusive. In the case of *Huckleberry Finn*, in juxtaposition with the trickery of the Duke and the King, Huck's trickery is morally warranted because of Huck's association with Jim. Huck's adventure is not as self-serving as the Duke and the King's search for monetary reward and social status. Although Huck may be serving his desire for adventure, Huck's adventure has a larger moral dimension. Moreover, Huck's trickery echoes the trickery of a nation that claims all are equal, yet fosters a slave society upon which a powerful segment of the population has built their wealth. In this manner, slave owners are not too different from the Duke and the King, in that the slave owner cons his or her subjects into servitude. Some comic tricksters may fail in their deceptive and self-serving tricks, such as the Duke and the King, or Wile E. Coyote in the *Road Runner* cartoons or Elmer Fudd in the *Bugs Bunny* cartoons. In each instance, the predator's tricks are foiled by the otherwise weaker animal, as if to claim that trickery in the hands (or paws) of the powerful is bad form. Trickery by the weaker cartoon animals may be the only means by which to effectively battle the hunters. Whether used for selfish gain or for principle, the trickery on either side is entertaining. For an example of a mixture of moral principle and selfish pursuit, consider *Dumb and Dumber*. As the title suggests, the characters are comic dolts whose tactics are something to laugh at; while they personally take advantage of money in a briefcase they intend to return, their acts of selfish indulgence are better than the aims of their gangster antagonists, which involves extortion.

The emphasis of the American dream on material and social success also alters the notion of the successful hero and successful academic in that they are successful not because they risk for an ideal, but they are successful because they have demonstrated their prowess and intelligence, or because they have gained social status and power. The greater principle behind a gangsta rapper's declaration of his or her prowess is unclear; indeed, an image of success and power is favoured over the communication of a greater principle. Similarly, although James Bond is fighting for her majesty's secret service, it is unclear what her majesty represents. Rather, James Bond is a suave declaration of manly cool, with adventures so formulaic that the narrative is less about believing in a serious risk than in enjoying the ritual demonstration of Bond's classy confidence, calculation, and control. Socially, the North American academic holds an authoritative and powerful position, involving a regular demonstration of his or her intellect, either in front of a class of students, during a conference with colleagues, or through publications.

In this dissertation, one focus is the comic interrogation of the confident cognizant agency demonstrated by the hero and the scholar. Such an interrogation may uphold or subvert confident cognizant agency. Depending upon one's interpretive slant, as illustrated earlier with the Bakhtin/Eco dispute over how subversive comedy or humour is, a comic text may indirectly uphold or critically question confident cognizant agency. Popular heroic figures such as James Bond, Tarzan, Sherlock Holmes, or even some outlaw heroes (such as the cowboy, gangster, or rebel police officer) routinely demonstrate an ability to wield their bodies and their brains with a control that is pivotal to both their success and their status as great. Because of their status as intelligent, capable, and successful, the academic shares some cultural space with that of the popular

American hero. Academics hold high cultural status in part, because they are valued for their knowledge; in fact, academics foster personae that feed the positive cultural perception of scholars as intelligent, serious, cultured, and elite beings.

Placed in the theoretical tradition that sees laughter as unbecoming, the inclusion of the academic in the study of the comical is also appropriate. Since Aristotle, comic art has occupied a lesser place in academia than art forms deemed more serious. As a result, the complexity of comic art may have been overlooked or underemphasized. In addition, the view that laughter involves "laughing at" an ostracized comic target is an assumption that affords a position of greater intelligence and capability. Perhaps this theoretical view serves a cultural purpose of upholding the need for academics to be viewed as insightful and competent. Superiority theory in particular advances the notion that laughter stems from fostering a sense of superiority or triumph. As it pertains to knowledge, when one gets a joke, one laughs not only because the joke may be funny, but also because one has understood the joke's twist. To put it differently, one has resolved the incongruous twist, or one has demonstrated his or her superiority over the joke text. When someone understands a joke, then, he or she laughs; but, when someone does not understand a joke, then, he or she does not enter that club of knowing laughers. For some, the laugher is superior to those who do not comprehend the joke; in other words, no one wants to be the one who does not get the joke. Getting the joke makes one feel a part of the in-group and thus makes one feel superior and knowing. Another need for including the academic in this study is that the marginalization of the comical and the power of superiority theory may correlate with academic culture's need to foster personae that are intelligent, serious, cultured, and elite – an in-group of knowers who laugh at those with lesser intelligence.

By comparing the superior knowing laugher with the elite academic, one may notice some interesting similarities.

I. D. The Difficulty with Comic Categories

Terms associated with the laughter-inciting or amusing texts, such as comedy, parody, pastiche, satire, and irony have an extensive critical and artistic history, consisting of critical debates surrounding their definitions and which artistic works are best identifiable as comedy, parody, pastiche, satire, or irony. Other related terms, such as burlesque and hoax have similar disputes waging around definition and classification.[43] Comedy, parody, and irony can be associated with differing artistic epochs (ancient Greece, ancient Rome, the Middle Ages, the Renaissance), differing cultural spheres (Greece, English, American), and differing artistic mediums (poetry, music, drama, novels, short stories, essays, radio, cinema, and television). In addition, these terms can be associated with technological (such as silent cinema or early sound cinema) developments, the work of celebrated artists (Dorothy Parker, Stephen Leacock) and performers (Lucille Ball, Gracie Allen, Carol Burnett, Lily Tomlin). Comedy, parody, and irony take on further variations based upon how they circulate through the arguments and contemplations of scholars in different fields (philosophy, drama, literature, rhetoric, and media). One difficulty in researching comedy, parody, satire, and irony is sifting through the various extensions and limitations demonstrated by different scholars. Further complicating matters, all of the terms, but especially comedy and irony, can identify works that do not necessarily or primarily generate laughter. In such instances, identifying comic and non-comic comedy or irony would be helpful; however, rather than such a qualifier, the tendency is to conflate the comic and the non-comic under the rubric of comedy or irony.

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[43] Often, texts belong to more than one category simultaneously; for instance, Orson Welles's *War of the Worlds* broadcast is, at once, an adaptation of H.G. Well's novel, a radio play, an Orson Welles piece, a text of science-fiction action, and something that was read as a hoax. Since its infamous debut, the broadcast has also become a historical media phenomenon and the legal precedent ordering broadcasts to identify themselves as fictional or non-fictional.

To illustrate the difficulty, consider the following brief exploration of Dante's *Divine Comedy* in terms of its categorization as a comedy. One critical tendency has been to simply extend the definition of comedy as a drama that ends happily to various epochs, cultural spheres, and mediums. Dante's *The Divine Comedy* ends happily, quite literally in Paradise, and so, in that general sense of comedy as perceived by the Middle Ages, Dante's epic poem is a comedy. In *Comedy*, Andrew Stott explains that structurally "Dante's poem, like Greek and Roman comedy before it, moves out of ignorance to understanding and towards a happy conclusion, or in terms of its theological framework, from despair to eternal life" (22). While the work extends the ancient notion of comedy via its association with Christian theology, the work is more than another text providing us with the trans-historical narrative trajectory of a journey towards bliss.[44] As Hart points out, the comic plot is well suited for the Bible. In *Northrop Frye*, referring to Frye, Hart points out the close connection between the comic plot and the Biblical trajectory:

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[44] In *Northrop Frye*, Jonathan Hart provides the following explanation of Frye's conception of comedy: "Frye is drawn to the conventionality of comedy, which is not surprising considering that conventions and the genres they build are at the centre of archetypal criticism. His theory also emphasizes the comic discovery, *anagnorisis* or *cognitio*, for instance, when the heroine and hero find themselves together in a new society as part of the resolution at the end of Greek New Comedy, and this emphasis is in keeping with a critic fascinated with recognition, with a modernism or modern poetic temperament that returns to the Middle Ages for an inscaped epiphany (163; see also Cave 1988). In observing the tendency of comedy to include as many characters in its final society as possible, Frye sees its complexity, the tragic possibilities of the scapegoat as well as the usual practice of reconciling or converting the blocking characters (165-6). He thinks that comedy, like tragedy, has a catharsis in which sympathy and ridicule are raised only to be cast out (177)" (76).

> In his observations on Shakespearean comedy, Frye returns to one of his favourite themes. He says this genre is as clear as any *mythos* as an example of 'the archetypal function of literature in visualizing the world of desire, not as an escape from "reality", but as the genuine form of the world that human life tries to imitate' (184). He reminds us that Plautine comedy and the Bible itself have the same kind of comic plot, a son appeasing the wrath of his father and 'redeeming' a society and a bride (185). (76)

Hart's reminder of the link between the comic plot and the Bible is one that Barry Sander's underemphasizes in *Sudden Glory*; Sanders claims an antagonism between religion and laughter.[45] As Dante, Frye, and Hart point out, the comic plot is shared by the Bible, Plautus, and, by implication, even Hollywood.

According to Christian Moevs in the 1999 *MLN* article "God's Feet and Hands," Dante's epic stems from a non-dualistic worldview, which is at odds with contemporary notions of duality. Because Dante's worldview is different from ours, simply taking his work to be a comedy in the contemporary sense, or alternatively, taking contemporary works to be comedies only if they adhere to Dante's canonical standard, would be contentious.[46] Nevertheless, there are links. For instance, *The Divine Comedy* is a significant and specific cultural phenomenon, signalling the rise of the vernacular and the rise of the Christian conception of Hell. Indirectly, in the context of Latin and Italian as high and low languages, the use of the vernacular loosely ties into Aristotle's notion that comedy uses "low" language – *The Divine Comedy* is not full of vulgar language, in the sense of profanity, however. Moving away from the general notion of Hades as the underworld, a place for the dead, as believed to be the conception held by the ancient western world, *The Divine Comedy* reconciles the ancient world with the burgeoning Christian worldview, presenting hell as a place of sinful punishment. In this way, indirectly, *The Divine Comedy* relates to Frye's conception of comedy incorporating social change.

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[45] In *Laughing Gods, Weeping Virgins*, Ingvild Sælid Gilhus locates a connection between religion and laughter: "just as strenuously as some religions have tried to contain laughter, others have exploited its eruptive force, as seen for instance in the ancient Greek cult of Dionysus, the god of laughter; in the guffawing of the Zen monks; in the Gnostics making myths about Christ's laughter at the crucifixion; in the Feast of Fools in the Middle Ages; and in today's charismatic Christian movements where people roll on the floor in the aisle of the church, overcome by unquenchable laughter. In short, laughter thrives in religions. Its ambiguity makes it an apt expression for religious experience as well as a powerful religious symbol. Like religion, laughter is situated at the intersection between body and mind, individual and society, the rational and the irrational. When laughter works itself into the religious universe, it reveals unexpected connections between elements in the religious web and creates alternative meanings to those held by the mainstream interpreters of the religion in question" (1-2). When taken alongside Puritan beliefs, Sanders and others, such as John Morreall (in "The Rejection of Humor") correctly identify a religious bias towards laughter. However, Sanders and Morreall overlook the ritual origins of comedy and the parallel between comic form and the Jesus narrative. Although neither Sanders nor Morreall identify the narrative, the death and resurrection of Jesus is one explicit link between religion and comedy that is not negative. In *Theology as Comedy*, following Wylie Sypher and Dan Via, George Aichele makes the following claim: "The basic comic characters are the *alazôn* or impostor and the *eirôn* or buffoon. The comic plot lies in the struggle between these two, and the ultimate defeat of the impostor, who attempts to lead people astray into foolishness, by the buffoon, who pretends to be a fool in order to unmask the true foolishness of the impostor. However, the impostor then becomes the scapegoat, bearing away the sins of the community in order to save it, and to further complicate matters, impostor and buffoon are frequently alter egos, the two sides of one character. The implicit crucifixion/resurrection is therefore given a double meaning. The fool may be an innocent sufferer, a slick parasite or a mad-man-prophet -- or, somehow, all three at once. In any case, she is set apart from the rest of the world, detached from and indifferent to it" (31-32). The overlap between the *alazôn* and *eirôn* will be taken up in Chapter IV, "Comic Nescience."

Adding to the poem's complexity, while Dante's masterpiece is generally taken to be a comedy because it ends in Paradise and not because it incites laughter, the work is not without material that can be interpreted as bordering upon the satirical. Specifically and more directly connected to the comical as the ridiculing of those behaviours deemed inappropriate by a social norm, in this case a religious norm, *The Divine Comedy* makes allusions to figures who would be recognizable to Dante's original audience; note also how the use of the vernacular would add to the force of such contemporaneous references. Dante's references, like that of Aristophanic Comedy, are both personal and public. For instance, in the 1999 article "Why Dante Damned Francesca de Rimi" in *Philosophy and Literature*, Peter Levine points out that Francesa was an actual person who was closely connected to Dante's family. Pointing out that Dante was thinking like a philosopher, there is a potential that Dante's work has similarities to the idea-centred plots of satirical works. In the 2004 *Logos* article "Dante and the Scandals of a Beloved Church," Nancy Enright identifies Dante's critical references to prominent Christian figures. While Enright does not find the references satirical in the comic sense, Dante is certainly taking a risky moral stance and holding his targets up for serious judgment; certainly, Dante is bringing figures like Pope Celestine V and Boniface VIII low. Because of such references, by punishing recognizable figures from his private life and from the public sphere, *The Divine Comedy* may nonetheless be humorous in a notorious sense, inciting, at the very least, some shocked or nervous laughter.[47]

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[46] Because it emerges in the Middle Ages, Dante's *Divine Comedy* may bear some relationship to the minstrels, the *trouvère*, and the Goliards. According to *In Praise of Comedy*, explaining these links between oral and written humour, Feibleman says: "About the twelfth century, the wandering minstrel began to give way to the *trouvère*, who were the educated nobles and merchants devoting themselves to composition in the vernacular. Minstrelsy was at its height from the eleventh to the thirteenth centuries. During this time, the minstrels served the purposes of comedy well" (41). Feibleman explains that minstrels satirized customs via mimicry. Feibleman goes on to say that "while the *trouvère*, "benefited by the invention of printing, and the minstrel henceforth declined to the status of a mere reciter of songs written by the *trouvère*" (41). As for the Goliards, Feibleman says they "were wandering clerics, scholars travelling from one university to another, more given to wine, women, and dice than to studies. They wrote many famous ballads, of which the most famous, The Confession of Golias, "is a song of the open road, of the vagabond life, of taverns and hard drinking, of sport and mocking irreverence, of love, of spring, of gamesters, of poverty, of sorrow and defiance" (41).

This study is primarily concerned with those works that are more easily recognizable as laughter-generating or amusing texts, but even then, the difficulty of exclusive categorization does not become less complicated. Mark Twain's *Huckleberry Finn* is at once an adventure novel in the tradition of the European picaresque, and a novel of education, not unlike a German *bildungsroman*. As with its Spanish counterpart,

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[47] Please note that, in large part, this reading of Dante as inciting laughter is based upon my contemporary bias, which assumes that Dante's audience would react to the critique of certain Church leaders in a way that audiences react to humorous condemnations of politicians or public figures today. I also readily admit that I may be stretching things a bit. However, I aim to illustrate both the difficulty and the temptation – because there are significant differences and possible connections – of placing the comedy of Dante, rooted in the politics of his day, with, for instance, a comedy from Mel Brooks or the satire of Jonathan Swift – even though Dante's work is not called *Blazin' Comedy* or the *Divine Proposal*.

Finn is an example of realism; within the American tradition, *Finn* is an example of documenting regional dialects. Moreover, Huck's quest is also a parody of all of these, as well as a satire, critiquing, for instance, race politics in the United States, under the safety valve or disguise of a kid's book. Similarly, Allan Sokal's infamous essay "Transgressing the Boundaries" is at once a hoax, a parody, a satire, and an essay. At once, *Cinderella Man* is a sports film, a biography, a drama, a period piece, a Russell Crowe vehicle, and a Ron Howard film. As an overall category then, whether specifically comedic, parodic, or satiric, or whether in short story, essay, novel, sound recording, or cinematic (or more correctly, DVD version) form, the various works in this analysis can be identified as comic, because a common element is their function to inspire laughter.[48] More importantly however, this dissertation does not aim to challenge differing definitions of comic categories, but instead, assumes and illustrates that comic texts benefit from fostering categorical nescience (or ambiguity). For instance, as opposed to only an adventure, if Mark Twain conceives his work as an adventure, a parody, and a satire, then the text is more artistically complex. Similarly, if critics widen their understanding of any one work, beyond debating, for instance, whether a work belongs to one category or another, then the critical understanding, as it pertains to the layers of comic art, are also enriched.[49]

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[48] The distinction between celluloid and DVD versions of a film is, at times, a significant but conventionally overlooked element of film analysis. An actual film screening in a full-sized theatre radically heightens the scope of the sound and image experience, as well as changing the viewing experience from a solitary one to being a part of a larger audience. Viewing film in a theatre also highlights how cinema is a collective cultural experience, like literature is, but with a significant difference: literature can be read in private and alone, whereas viewing film, unless the film is especially unpopular or one has private access to a cinema house, involves the assembly of an audience. However technically appropriate, quite possibly because it sounds even more frivolous than Film Studies does, "DVD studies" has not and, most likely in the near future, will not replace Film Studies or Broadcast Media Studies.

[49] This is not to say that critics should not debate whether, for instance, *Don Quixote* is more of a parody than a satire. Such debates are highly valuable and insightful. In addition, critics should attempt to define

Another difficulty concerns the academic circulation versus the popular circulation of categorization terms. Academic overviews of the debates surrounding comedy, parody, and irony (for instance, by Stott, Rose, and Colebrook, respectively) illustrate the intricacy of categorization problems within the scholarly world. Although relatively unacknowledged within scholarly treatments, an even further complication is the popular use and circulation of the varying comic categories. While it may be tempting for scholars to ignore the popular complication to comic categorization, popular conceptions require some acknowledgment. Admittedly, it is beyond the scope of this already ambitious study to gather sociological information regarding conceptions of circulating comic categories. Nevertheless, since academics define the comic, laughter, wit, humour, and other such concepts as fundamentally social, then it follows that the similarity and the disparity between academic and cultural conceptions need addressing. Certainly, the contemporary conception of both Aristotle and ancient Greece alters if Aristotle's observations and ruminations have little connection to lived experience. Today, academics assume Aristotle is part dramatic critic and part sociologist, offering evidence of the way drama was viewed and judged, not just by Aristotle, but also, by others who awarded playwrights and attended plays. Aristotle provides standards and details that the average playgoer may not regularly conceive of, but nonetheless, a link between Aristotle's landmark definition and lived culture is implied.

If one assumes that Aristotle (in his *Poetics*) is describing the tragedy of his day as something that the public recognizes as tragedy, then such an assumption is not

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the varying comic categories. Indeed, such definitions are necessary if, as is claimed here, an artist or critic is to conceive how a work fosters qualities of varying categories. Having said that, such definitions and categories need to be somewhat flexible, dependent upon the historical time of the work, the cultural situation, and other such factors.

necessarily as uniformly sustained in the relationship between contemporary scholarly discourses and lived cultural experience. In part, a difficulty is varying circumstances: Aristotle is one man writing of one time period and class of theatre-goers, while today, there are a great number of critics writing about several different time periods, cultures, and subcultures. Even so, when one notices that comedy is used to refer to different art forms, from dramas in classrooms to radio plays, television sitcoms, and stand up performances, then the lived experience of comedy as a category requires some acknowledgment by academics.

In *Comedy*, Andrew Stott acknowledges the multiple meanings of comedy by advancing a multi-lateral definition. If doing so helps describe the varying ways audiences understand other comic genres, then a multi-lateral definition may prove useful when describing the social circulation of terms such as parody, irony, satire, humour, farce, and so on. The risk for scholars is that greater confusion will shroud already complicated and, at times, contradictory discussions of humour. Yet, herein lies an important difficulty with the study of humour. If Frye and Bergson deem humour as something intrinsically linked to actual social experience social, and if varying comic genres alter in differing historical and cultural contexts, then the connections and the lack of connections between academic and non-academic understandings of the terms require some acknowledgement. That acknowledgment may be, at the very least, an admission that an academic work needs to avoid recognizing how contemporary readers or spectators identify a comedy, a parody, an ironic work, or a satire.[50]

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[50] If contemporary readers or spectators blur generic distinctions, then, in terms of allowing for working definitions in analysis, academics benefit from articulating boundaries between various comic genres.

I. E. The Difficulty with Categorization and National Identity

When it comes to national, cultural, and linguistic spheres in relation to categorization, the situation becomes even more complicated, especially in a world where multiculturalism and globalization are more a reality for many readers, audiences, and scholars. For instance, restricting figures such as Tarzan, Sherlock Holmes, and James Bond to Britain would overlook their cross-cultural status, an important marker of their popularity. Certainly, there may be some pride for an English fan to claim ownership of such popular figures, but they are more than simply British icons. In *Reality Isn't What It Used To Be*, Walter Truett Anderson points out that a postmodern world alters traditional categories of nationhood and identity, especially identifiable with the concept of memes: "The British zoologist Richard Dawkins . . . coined the term *memes* to describe replicating mental patterns – the cultural equivalent of genes" (21).[51] Tarzan, Holmes, and Bond exist beyond England and beyond the English-speaking world, as global memes, recognizable icons crossing cultural boundaries, not unlike a Beatles song or a well-circulated joke, either via the Internet or through the word of laughing mouths.

Tarzan, for instance, may be mistaken as a solely British icon, because the character has British parentage. In *Tarzan and the Apes* it says:

> We know only that on a bright May morning in 1888,

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[51] This is not to say that flexibility in national identities did not exist before postmodernism. For Dawkins, postmodern globalism is invested in open cross-cultural exchange. However, for several hundreds of years before postmodernism, cultures have been exchanging ideas in science, art, and music. During different periods, some cultural spheres may have been more "nationalistic" than others. ("Nationalistic" is not the correct term, because the nation-state is more of a recent invention; before that, there may have been tribal or regional equivalents of patriotism). For an example of cross-cultural exchange, consider how music may be used in the service of nationalism (such as with anthems) or music can cross cultural boundaries (such as with jazz or more recently, hip hop). Dawkins implies that before postmodernism, cultures did not exchange ideas with one another, overlooking the existence of the Indo-European language group or the spread of mathematics and scientific discoveries. With the mass media and the ease of travel, today, cultural exchange is more visible, and cultural groups are less apt to become isolated with one another after such exchange. As a result, nations may be less likely to claim ownership over an idea or type of music; however, for those who are especially patriotic, that may still occur.

> John, Lord Greystoke, and Lady Alice sailed from Dover on their way to Africa. A month later they arrived at Freetown where they chartered a small sailing vessel, the Fuwalda, which was to bear them to their final destination. And here John, Lord Greystoke, and Lady Alice, his wife, vanished from the eyes and from the knowledge of men. (http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/78)

Edgar Rice Burroughs, although he wrote of an English Lord and Lady, and their feral child, was an American. First appearing in the pulp magazine *All-Story* in 1912, Tarzan quickly become a popular culture icon, moving into numerous novels, cinematic, comic book, radio, and television serial adaptations. Multi-media and multi-linguistic, despite the fact that the author is American and the character's parents are British, Tarzan is more than simply an American or British icon. Rather, Tarzan is a multi-national phenomenon.

Similarly, Sherlock Holmes may be limited to England, however, in this case, the author, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle, was born in Scotland and is of Irish ethnic heritage. Moreover, what makes Holmes a popular phenomenon exists beyond the novelistic characterization. Holmes is representative of a wider value for reason and science – the world believes in logic.[52] If one takes the factor of intertextuality into account, then

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[52] Because of the existence of international scientific communities of varying fields, international medical communities, and international legal bodies (where decisions are made based upon evidence and logic), it is fair to say the world values science and logic. This is not to say that other means of inquiry or knowledge are not valuable, but scientific knowledge is a recognizably valuable global phenomenon. For instance, to name only a few, consider the existence of relatively standard international numerical systems, time zones, and navigational systems. Although not every nation (or, in Canada, province) adopts daylight savings time, the fact that daylight savings time exists as a debatable concept reveals the pervasiveness of the scientific worldview. Changing the clock back for an hour in the fall and forward in the spring is largely unnecessary in terms of daily existence; however, because our world values scientific knowledge, many nations have adopted or debated (and decided against) adopting the practice of observing the bi-annual change in the earth's tilt. Similarly, although not every nation has adopted the metric system, the metric system is a mathematical consistent international system that helps prove the worldwide adoption of the ten-point mathematical language. Only two measurement systems, Fahrenheit or Celsius, exist for measuring temperature, when theoretically there can be as many different systems as there are languages. But, instead, only two prevail. (Two reasons as to why certain nations do not adopt the metric system are tradition and power. Changing from one system to another takes time and an adjustment that certain nations do not find necessary to experience. When it comes to driving on the left or right side of the road,

Holmes is also more than simply a British icon. Specifically, Holmes is derivative of Edgar Allan Poe's detective, Monsieur C. Auguste Dupin, who appears in "The Murders in the Rue Morgue," The Mystery of Marie Roget," and "The Purloined Letter." Making matters more confusing in terms of ethnic identity, Dupin is French, but is penned by an American. Nevertheless, the template for the fictional Holmes (who was named after the American poet Oliver Wendell Holmes) is in Poe's Dupin. Consider, for instance, how "The Murders in the Rue Morgue" stresses superior intellectual capabilities:

> The analytical power should not be confounded with simple ingenuity; for while the analyst is necessarily ingenious, the ingenious man is often remarkably incapable of analysis. The constructive or combining power, by which ingenuity is manifested, and to which the phrenologists (I believe erroneously) have assigned a separate organ, supposing it a primitive faculty, has been so frequently seen in those whose intellect bordered otherwise upon idiocy, as to have attracted general observation among writers on morals. Between ingenuity and the analytic ability there exists a difference far greater, indeed, than that between the fancy and the imagination, but of a character very strictly analogous. It will be found, in fact, that the ingenious are always fanciful, and the *truly* imaginative never otherwise than analytic. (*The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, 143)

In Poe's stories, Dupin, not unlike Quixote, is from an illustrious family, but has been reduced to poverty; also, like Quixote, Dupin makes books "his sole luxuries" (143). Unlike Quixote, and like Holmes, Dupin has a sound grasp of reason. Dupin and Holmes

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for instance, in England, the left side of the road is a tradition dating back to the days of horse-drawn carriages that made practical sense for the time. Instituting a wide-scale change today would take time and money, as well as, of course, erasing one unique facet of life in England or some former English colonies that tourists find interesting and that may be, for some, a marker of national difference. Preserving a tradition is not the only reason however, because power also factors into the situation. Nations such as England and the United States style themselves as world leaders, so their refusal to adopt the metric system is a means of preserving their sense of autonomy and power; in other words, no one can tell them what to do with their numbers). Hence, despite certain variations, the existence of a limited type of international practices, bodies, and measurement systems demonstrates that the world respects science and logic.

both have a partner who relates the narrative, along with moments of awe at the brilliance of their detective friends. From Poe's story, Dupin is a mysterious genius:

> "He is a very little fellow, that's true, and would do better for the *Théâtre des Variétés*."
> "There can be no doubt of that," I replied, unwittingly, and not at first observing (so much had I been absorbed in reflection) the extraordinary manner in which the speaker had chimed in with my meditations. In an instant afterward I recollected myself, and my astonishment was profound.
> "Dupin," said I, gravely, "this is beyond my comprehension. I do not hesitate to say that I am amazed, and can scarcely credit my senses. How was it possible that you should know I was thinking of ------?" Here I paused, to ascertain beyond a doubt whether he really knew of whom I thought.
> "------- of Chantilly," said he, "why do you pause? You were remarking to yourself that his diminutive figure unfitted him for tragedy." (*The Complete Tales and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, 145)

It is a brilliance that borders upon the psychic. Consider the parallel exchange in *The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes*:

> "Wedlock suits you," he remarked. "I think, Watson, that you have put on seven and a half pounds since I saw you."
> "Seven!" I answered.
> "Indeed, I should have thought a little more. Just a trifle more, I fancy, Watson. And in practice again, I observe. You did not tell me that you intended to go into harness."
> "Then, how do you know?"
> "I see it, I deduce it. How do I know that you have been getting yourself very wet lately, and that you have a most clumsy and careless servant girl?"
> "My dear Holmes," said I, "this is too much. You would certainly have been burned, had you lived a few centuries ago. It is true that I had a country walk on Thursday and came home in a dreadful mess, but as I have changed my clothes I can't imagine how you deduce it. As to Mary Jane, she is incorrigible, and my wife has given her notice, but there, again, I fail to see how you work it out."
> (http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/1661)

As evidenced by this exchange, there is an intertextual (and thus inter-cultural) link between Dupin and Holmes. If one considers other similarities, such as the detective's ability to solve the narrative's central mystery, or character traits of intelligence and flashes of insight, then there are more similarities between Dupin and Holmes. Along with the Irish heritage of the author, because of its links to an American short story of a French detective, it would be, in the verbiage of such detectives, a miscalculation to simply consider Sherlock Holmes as British. As with the many incarnations of Tarzan, Sherlock Holmes takes on many variations, evident in the differences between the original novels and their television and film adaptations.

Similarly, James Bond is more than just a British icon. Bond is an interesting figure, for while he was penned by a mid-twentieth-century British author, his development into a global icon was much more cross-cultural. In 1954, for instance, Bond first appeared on American television's *Climax!* (on CBS) as an American spy, Jimmy Bond, played by Barry Nelson. The self-proclaimed Scottish nationalist Sean Connery helps make the character an icon by starring in six films, beginning in 1962. Since Connery (Scottish), George Lazenby (Austrailian), Roger Moore (English), Timothy Dalton (Welsh), and Pierce Brosnan (Irish) have played Bond, providing several variations of the character, all of which differ from the original characterization in the source novels. For instance, Moore plays up the humour; Dalton makes the character darker, while Connery relies a lot on a coolness that seemed an ideal manifestation of the 1960s playboy. As an interesting bit of literary trivia, the character Bond is not even of English ethnic origin; rather, he is the son of a Scottish father and Swiss mother.[53]

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[53] According to *Books and Writers* at http://www.kirjasto.sci.fi/ifleming.htm, the "Ian (Lancaster) Fleming," entry.

Beginning in 1953, the novels and short stories by Ian Fleming introduced a heavy drinking, chain-smoking, womanizing secret agent that typified the playboy lifestyle that can also be associated with American Hugh Heffner's rise to popularity during the same era – in fact, Heffner's *Playboy* magazine begins in the same year. Soon after Bond's literary debut, the Bond character became a multi-media phenomenon, appearing in comic strips, radio, television, comic books, and most famously, film.[54] While the novels were popular, the EON production company is also responsible for the global popularity of the films. Although they were living in England when the company was created, Italian-American Albert R. Broccoli and Canadian Harry Saltzman founded EON. The daughter and stepson of Broccoli currently run EON. Rather than being limited to the status of British icon, Bond then, can simultaneously serve as a British icon, an American icon, and a popular culture icon, because of his cross-cultural links.[55]

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[54] Referring to Bennett and Woollacott in *Bond and Beyond* in *British Cultural Studies*, Turner explains Bond's "inter-textuality" in the following manner: "Summarizing Bennet and Woolacott's view, in *British Cultural Studies*, Turner declares: "The career of James Bond spans more than four decades, and his meanings have been produced by quite different social and textual determinants at any one point. James Bond, within one set of inter-textual relations, is an aristocratic, traditional British hero who celebrates the imperial virtues of breeding, taste and authority; and within another set of inter-textual relations, the same books are read as producing a figure who is modern, iconoclastic, a living critique of an outmoded class system and whose politics are those of Western capitalism, not merely of Britain" (101-102).

[55] Relegating certain texts to only one cultural sphere overlooks the fluid exchange of artistic ideas and the problematic category of nationhood. In terms of artistic intertextuality, for instance, Bond's episodic adventures have similarities with American comic book superheroes, heroic folklore adventures, stories of chivalric knights, and Homeric heroes. The American television series *Survivor* plays off of a *Robinson Crusoe* type of situation. According to the PBS documentary *John Lennon's Jukebox* and Ed Ward's essay about the Beatles, which can be found at http://www.pbs.org/wnet/gperf/shows/lennon/essay1.html, "it sounded like they were doing something utterly original. But they weren't, not entirely" (2). The Beatles were directly inspired by other artists, especially black American musicians; in some cases, they tried to mimic them, but failed, producing instead, what was heralded as a new sound. As a further aside, interestingly, there is cultural praise for the originality of the Beatles, but when it comes to the sampling and re-mixing of rap artists, hip hop music is critiqued as unoriginal. However, both the Beatles and certain hip hop music may both be equally derivative, it is just that while the Beatles hide their influence (in their musical influences, in their music, not their interviews), hip hop tends to bring their influence to the foreground, laying bare the very notion of influence and adaptation, in a gesture of artistic cannibalism, in a sense. Culturally, the notion of the Beatles (white and English) as original, when compared to hip hop artists (many of whom are black Americans), may also signal a racist undercurrent, that ties into Eurocentric notions of artistic hierarchy. In terms of the problematic category of nationhood, consider the cultural status of Aristotle. Today, he is considered a Greek intellectual icon, but that is not all he is. For

Regardless of the tendency to group artists and art into national, religious, or ethnic categories, such categories may be more fluid and flexible when it comes to popular figures and texts. Statistically speaking, to become popular, one needs to draw a diverse readership or audience that spans across categories of race, gender, ethnicity, and nationhood. Hence, Chaplin, for instance, can be a British icon, an American icon, and a global icon.[56] Although the Tramp and Bond are British icons, they represent different notions of Englishness, if Englishness is only what they represent. The poverty-stricken, bumbling clown is the opposite of the suave and handsome Bond. Within England even, Chaplin and Bond may have differing meanings for audience members with different tastes; for some, Bond may be an ideal representative of British cool, while for others, Bond may be a misogynistic male fantasy. Quite possibly, Bond is both and more. Samuel Clemens as Mark Twain is famous, beyond his initial personal identity, or via translation, beyond his regional, linguistic, and national heritage. Some artists become an intimate part of the imagination of readers across the world; television and film versions of Twain's work further extend the persona of Twain to harbour new meanings, meanings that, at the very least, keep his work circulating, and breathe new life into scholarship.

In terms of scholarship, it is currently popular to unify certain works with the phrase "English-language." While it bears the rhetorical charm of seemingly providing

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one, the notion of Greece as a nation was different during Aristotle's days of city-states. Two, Aristotle is also an icon of western civilization. And, via Averroes or Ibn Rushd, the twelfth century Islamic translator and commentator on Aristotle's works, the works of Aristotle that are re-introduced into the West are not without some Middle Eastern influence. Appropriately, Aquinas calls Aristotle and Averroes the Philosopher and the Commentator, respectively. In this sense, the work of Aristotle that western culture claims (as an originating point for literary analysis), is more than simply western. When it comes to earnest cross-cultural analyses and exchange, nationalistic divisions tend to fade, somewhat, in the service of the growth of art and ideas. When it comes to exerting one's nationalistic greatness or supposed distinctiveness, such cross-cultural influences may be deliberately hidden, forgotten, or overlooked.

[56] Global in the sense that Chaplin is an identifiable figure in several different nations. Perhaps, Chaplin is not known in every single nation or perhaps Chaplin is not regarded in the same manner or to the same degree as he is in the United States or England, but it is highly likely that Chaplin exists beyond the American and English cultural and linguistic spheres.

detail, the phrase "English-language" is somewhat misleading. The English language in the United States is different from the English language in Britain, especially in *Huck Finn*. The language in *Huck Finn* is different from the language used by Americans today. *Huck Finn* explores differing regional dialects, so it is composed of different English, or more appropriately, American language variations. *Huck Finn* is an example of mid-nineteenth century American English with an explicit interest in documenting regional linguistic variations in the tradition of dialect humour and regional humour, whereas *James Bond* uses mid-twentieth century British pulp-fiction English with an explicit interest in being provocative. The English language in *James Bond* alters from novel to film and from film to film, especially when one acknowledges the Scottish accent of Sean Connery or the different English-language accents in any of the films. "English-language" may be misleading, because it overlooks English as a multi-cultural phenomenon.[57] Moreover, the phrase "English-language" downplays a popular text's international life span, as a work that may reach many different cultural spheres either through the English-language alone or through translation.

Conclusion of Background Information

Attitudes change and identities can be multiple, especially when taking an interdisciplinary approach to popular culture phenomenon. This dissertation acknowledges the emerging field of Humorology as an interdisciplinary attempt to study humour. Moving beyond the traditional conception of the film director as singular auteur, this dissertation admits a major difference between literary and film production. Since they both represent confident cognizant agency, heroes and academics have at least one similarity, which makes them interesting to study alongside one another. While disputes continue over the validity of comic categories, in a multi-disciplinary context, some flexibility regarding the boundaries of the differing categories is necessary. Even though certain heroic icons (who either directly or indirectly influence comic treatments of heroic agency) may have a strong non-fictional or fictional link with England, their status as popular icons makes such heroes more than simply British icons. Whether theoretical, generic, or racial/national, categorization systems require some appreciation for their potential openness. Admittedly, when it comes to literary categories, flux and disputes can lead to some degree of disorderliness. As the following theoretical survey will illustrate, categorization, much like the definitions of theoretical schools, are useful and convenient ideas, but upon close scrutiny, they may lead to more engaging questions, than easy answers.

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[57] It is valid to identify English in several different ways, as a colonizing language, an international language, a national language, or even a language of post-colonialism, for instance. The point is, when the scholar identifies a work as "English language," he or she is not simply describing the language being used by the texts. Rather, he or she may be ignoring important variations in the contemporary use of the English language, for the sake of providing a sense of unity via the notion of English as an identifier of linguistic uniformity or as means for easy categorization.

Chapter Two: Theoretical Survey

Humor can be dissected, as a frog can, but the thing dies in the process
White, E.B, "Some Remarks on Humor," 243

Introduction to a Survey of Critical Discussions

Whether because of scientific interest or something more depraved, for over two millennia, various thinkers have prodded E.B. White's frog, using at least three types of theoretical scalpels: superiority, release, and incongruity.[58] Despite the differing camps that have dominated historical discussions of the comic, it would be a mistake to conclude that there is no overlap between the approaches; rather, the theories tend to emphasize one key element (hostility, liberation, or contrast), over another. Even though some thinkers are more dogmatic than others, the theoretical concepts they conjure do have room for one another. As a result, it is important to handle the differing perspectives as convenient instruments, helping to organize competing opinions and acting as fulcrums for investigative discussion, rather than as the sole blade for tearing open the mysteries of what is comic. Nevertheless, the tendency has been to select one scalpel over another, so this survey will preserve, for the time being, such a propensity.[59]

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[58] In *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Salvatore Attardo begins his work by taking a metatheoretical approach, identifying three general types of theories used in humor research: essentialist (stress the fundamental quality or qualities of a phenomenon) theories, teleological (focus upon the goals of a phenomenon) theories, and substantialist (look for the unifying factor explaining contents of a phenomena) theories (1). Despite the differences, for Attardo, "all three types of theories are reductive/explanatory theories – that is, they all account for large scale phenomena by reducing them to simpler, better understood phenomena; similarly, they are predictive, in the sense that they can account for data outside of the corpus used to establish the theory" (2). Later, Attardo declares: "A commonly accepted classification divides theories of humor into three groups: incongruity theories (a.k.a. contrast) (Raskin 1985: 31-36), hostility/disparagement (a.k.a. aggression, superiority, triumph, derision) theories (Ibid.: 36-38), and release theories (a.k.a. sublimation, liberation) (Ibid.: 38-40)" (47). Attardo classifies these theories under three families, the cognitive (incongruity, contrast), social (hostility, aggression, superiority), and psychoanalytical (release, liberation) families of understanding humor (47). While Attardo's classification under three families is convenient to adopt, Attardo's method is not the only one available. To refer to at least one other system, consider James Feibleman's *In Praise of Comedy: A Study in Its Theory and Practice*. For instance, Feibleman identifies the Platonic and Aristotelian attitude as "Realistic Theory" (74-82). Feibleman categorizes Henri Bergson, Benedetto Croce, and E. F. Carritt under "The Subjective-Metaphysical" (130-133). In addition, Feibleman places Vladimir Jankélévitch, Max Eastman, Stephen Leacock, and others under the category, "The Subjective-Literary" (133-147). In other words, as demonstrated by Feibleman, there are other ways to categorize the history of critical attitudes towards laughter. However, the tripartite classification of Attardo and others (such as Morreall) will be used here.

Achieving agreement in determining what is comic is itself a tricky task, especially within an interdisciplinary framework. In the introduction of *Comedy/Cinema/Theory*, Andrew Horton believes, "like language, and like "texts" in general, the comic is plural, unfinalized, disseminative, dependent on *context* and the intertextuality of creator, text, and contemplator" (9). Similarly, in *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Salvatore Attardo identifies the difficulty in the following manner, referring to Croce, who wrote almost a century before Horton:

> Ultimately the very things that people find humorous seem to change. Croce (1903) claimed that humor could only be understood in a historical perspective and excluded the possibility of a theoretical definition of humor (Croce (1903:286); see Eco (1985:261) and Caserta (1983). This has led to a perhaps not unjustified pessimism on the very possibility of finding a common ground of analysis among the many socio-/historical manifestations of humor, let alone a determination of the necessary and sufficient conditions for humor to obtain. (7)[60]

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[59] Regarding the identification of three main theoretical categories, Daniel Wickberg in *Sense of Humor* makes an important qualification: "What the tripartite categorization of laughter theories obscures, in the first place, is that which is most obvious to the historian: superiority, incongruity, and relief theories, without exception, are modern in their origins. Premodern understandings of laughter frequently appear to be variants of the so-called superiority theory in the classificatory schemes of present-day analysts, but that is largely because these analysts interpret those understandings through the lens of the egoistic psychology of the modern era. It would be more appropriate to call these premodern understandings of laughter "deformity theories" rather than superiority theories, because they focus on the deformed nature of the laughable object rather than on the feeling of psychological superiority. In other words, the historical perspective reveals that there has been a long-term transition from a theoretical focus on the object of laughter and its qualities – the thing laughed at – to a newer concern with the psychological causes of laughter" (47).

[60] Amy Carrell's Audience-Based Theory of Verbal Humor is one recent approach (1990s) that specifically tackles the audience's role in successful humour. Before her, Freud and Bergson also identified the audience's role, as did Victor Raskin, Mahadev L. Apte, John Y.T. Greig, David Viktoroff, and William F. Fry. However, of the various thinkers, Carrell places the greatest stress on the audience as a producer, in a sense, of successful humour. On a wider paradigmatic scale, the work of Stuart Hall also typifies the move to treat audiences as viable producers of meaning, as opposed to passive receivers that is especially typical of the Marxist (and its varying hybrid manifestations) approach.

Croce's idea, via Attardo, is only partly correct, for there is evidence that certain jokes and situations are still rousing audiences to laughter. Consider, for instance, the continued popularity of *Lysistrata* the stage, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* on stage and film, and *Gulliver's Travels* in children's books or Hallmark television adaptations, or *Don Quixote* in critical discussions, stage adaptations, television cartoon adaptations, television movies, and even video games. Yet, Attardo is correct in addressing the contextual problems of determining what is funny across time and cultures, or by extension, even between different audiences of the same culture during a specific time. More complicated than simply changing across time and culture, audiences may or may not share similar senses of humour whether from different times and cultures or even within one cultural and temporal framework. A purely synchronic approach overlooks the diachronic qualities that serve the function of the comic as social ritual, whereas a purely diachronic methodology downplays significant variations in comic aesthetics, political commentary, and reception.[61]

As a result, this study acknowledges that the motivations for laughter may both bear consistent and inconsistent qualities across time and culture. In other words, the motivation for laughter is nescient, an uncertain and complicated combination of stable and unstable motivating factors.

Making matters even more complicated, major categories (such as comedy, parody, and irony) have a contentious range of overlapping meaning, with some texts that are identifiable as members of all three.[62] Adding to the confusion, there is an inconsistent use of key terms. Highly influential thinkers use key terms synonymously; in literary studies, Sigmund Freud and Henri Bergson use laughter and humour interchangeably.[63] Moreover, their ideas have skipped from one disciplinary shore to another, with Freud's work moving from early twentieth century psychoanalysis into literary and then interdisciplinary studies, while Bergson skips from philosophy and aesthetics into literature and media. Despite, their specific cultural and temporal milieus, Freud's and Bergson's ideas have sustained themselves as relatively dominant within literary and media studies. While they do have much to offer, it is nonetheless a valuable exercise to interrogate their contributions with the aim of furthering the field, especially within a contemporary multimedia context with heterogenous audiences.

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[61] Diachronic and synchronic are terms first popularized by Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure from the Greek *diá* (through), *sún* (together), and *khrónos* (time). Although Saussure's usage is specific to Structuralist linguistics, the terms have moved beyond their initial field; hence, they are used here, but that does not necessarily make this a Structuralist and linguistic study.

Along with complications caused by unclear terminology and the nomadic shift from one discipline to another, other key thinkers overlook major historical developments and distinctions. For instance, the term pastiche, popularized by Frederic Jameson in the 1980s and 1990s, alters parody to mean something non-comic within postmodernism, confusing the historical development of parody to serve recent notions of intertextuality. Earlier, John Jump in the 1970s, following Joseph Addison's work from the early 18th century, places parody as a subcategory of burlesque, ignoring conceptions of parody earlier than Addison and outside of England.[64] Freud, Bergson, Jameson, and to a lesser degree, Jump, are examples of major thinkers whose approaches to the comic, however valuable and influential, nonetheless downplay important theoretical history. Admittedly, the comic is a difficult concept to theorize, ~~so harsh~~ blame cannot be placed on Freud, Bergson, and others.

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[62] *Gulliver's Travels* is one text that can be regarded as a comedy, for the picaresque quest home, a parody, for its comic referencing of travelogues, and an ironic work, for its satirical depiction of humans as yahoos.

[63] The use of laughter and humour as interchangeable terms may be connected to the gap between the original language and the language of translation of the works of Freud and Bergson. In *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Attardo says, "Bergson clearly considers laughter and humor interchangeable, as can be seen from the complete title of his 1901 book "Laughter. Essay about the meaning of humor" (Bergson 1901), and so does Freud (1905: 15)" (10). This is especially significant considering how Freud and Bergson are major influences on literary analyses.

[64] In *Parody*, Margaret Rose surveys some such theoretical developments (54-192).

Humour eludes easy theorization on the general level, but taking a more specific and focused approach may also miss something. As Susan Purdie puts it in *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse*, joking is an overdetermined concept, with simply too many factors involved in successful joking (4). In Alexander Leggatt's *The Cambridge Companion to Shakespearean Comedy*, in "Theories of Comedy" David Galbraith declares:

> Comedy is notoriously resistant to theorization.[65] There is, after all, something inescapably comic and self-defeating about the scholar, oblivious to comedy's charms, searching out its origins or trying to account for its effects. In Cicero's *De Oratore*, one of the interlocutors in the discussion on the comic notes that everyone "who tried to teach anything like a theory or art of this matter proved themselves so conspicuously silly that their very silliness is the only thing laughable about them." Small wonder then, at the conclusion of Umberto Eco's *In the Name of the Rose* the sole manuscript of Aristotle's treatise on comedy, the counterpart to his discussion of tragedy in *The Poetics*, should perish and a fire destroy the monastery library in which the corpus of classical learning has been preserved. (3)

Despite the self-defeating quality, Galbraith identifies comedy as a multifaceted concept, evidenced by the alternate notions of what comedy is. Plato and Aristotle, and several thinkers since Plato and Aristotle, have theorized varying comic elements. Add to that the recent variations in literary form and media, as well as the diversity of thought from different western nations, as well as the range of sub-cultural (Jewish, African-American,

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[65] In *Comedy*, Andrew Stott addresses the difficulty of studying comedy in his opening lines, as does Susan Purdie in *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse*.

Gay and Lesbian) manifestations, then the developmental lines are all the more numerous.

Even with what little Plato says and with how scattered Aristotle's extant fragments are, their ideas, evident of the complexity of comedy in relation to the theorization of it, are not exclusive to one major theoretical approach. Some of the earliest theory (by Plato and Aristotle) circulates around two main ideas, the comical as ridicule, and comedy as a dramatic form, lesser than tragedy, which involves the ridiculing of lower types exhibiting socially inappropriate behaviour. Two other ideas are implicit in the first two: one, the possibility of ridicule as either fundamentally conservative or potentially subversive, and two, the notion of comedy as a festivity, (which connects to release and play theories). Indirectly, from these two implicit notions, comedy, parody, and irony expand from their origins as literary forms and rhetorical devices to elements that help characterize certain poststructural and postmodern philosophical perspectives.[66]

Respecting four qualifications (one, the possibility of confusing key terms; two, overlooking major historical developments; three, admitting a wide variation in terms of what is deemed comic; four, being sensitive to the dangerous possibility of killing the concept under scrutiny) the tangle of thoughts on the laughable can lead to at least three heavier threads. Those threads are laughter as ridicule, laughter as release, and laughter as incongruity.[67] Overall, the survey's categories are "artificial" in the sense that many of the thinkers and their theories, indicative of the complexity and overlapping quality of comic concepts, can be easily applied to more than one of the three areas. However, to avoid being repetitive, thoughts categorized in one area will not be restated; as a result, there will be an imbalance in the size of each category, with some receiving greater attention than others do. While the categories are easily debatable, they, nonetheless, will serve as convenient markers of at least three prevailing theoretical threads in the historical development of comic theory. With this section's opening words of E.B. White in mind, let the killing begin.

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[66] For instance, in *Philosophy Today*, in "Living On (Happily) Ever After," Robert S. Gall believes Derrida's writing exhibits qualities typically connected to joking and comedy. The comic strategies Derrida employs are termed by Gall as follows: the arbitrary and the discontinuous, repetition and reproduction, the ironic, utopia, and living on. In *Gender Trouble*, for Judith Butler, parody is reconceived to describe the performance of gender: "gay is to straight *not* as copy is to original, but, rather, as copy is to copy. The parodic representation of "the original" . . . reveals the original to be nothing other than a parody of the *idea* of the natural and the original" (41). In terms of irony, Lyotard's notion that postmodernism is characterized by an incredulity towards metanarratives, stresses the inability to believe in metanarratives; hence, belief is abandoned in favour of what can be seen as a distance that parallels the ancient spectator's view of the gods. That is, in the stands, spectators viewed the entire stage space and thus had a privileged position, compared to the characters on stage. The audience knows more than the characters do, making for an ironic relationship. (On this note, although postmodernism questions the knowing agent, postmodernism itself claims a greater knowledge than and about the knowing agent. Although it may not be typically read in such a manner, there is the implication that the postmodernist has a privileged position who knows more than those who believe in transcendence or other such "fictions").

I. The Prince Versus the Frog: Laughter as Ridicule

I. A. It's Not Easy Being Mean

In the western artistic and critical tradition, literary discussions of comedy typically begin in ancient Greece.[68] While film and broadcast media studies of comedy tend to focus on a smaller period (of both theoretical influences and texts analyzed), this study attempts to open up film and media studies to the larger theoretical tradition.[69] A notable difficulty with ancient Greece as a starting point is the fragmented quality of the writings of both philosophers and playwrights; however, what western society inherits becomes (almost anthropologically) representative of the Greek attitude. Perhaps, there were competing notions of the comic in ancient Greece, but primarily, what passes through the ages is an association between laughter and ridicule, culminating in Thomas Hobbes's sudden glory. The reasons for the popularity of superiority theory may be, only in part, due to a combination of the quality of the arguments offered by scholars building upon ideas planted by Plato and Aristotle; as mentioned in the background information, superiority theory coincides with the western cultural emphasis on social hierarchy, as well as, at times, on ethnic superiority. Academic theory does not exist in isolation, removed from wider social, political, and cultural attitudes. The longstanding popularity of superiority theory within academic circles, may partly stem from the university's own interest in fostering the academic persona as serious, prestigious, and more capable than

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[67] As an aside, an apologetic disclaimer is necessary for this survey. This survey will be incomplete, emphasizing only the major ideas and thinkers – whose works I am aware of and have had access to – deemed relevant at the writing of this thesis. Primarily, this survey will be composed of western, especially North American and European English language works and English language translations. Either because of a lack of space, a weakness in the writing itself, or simple oversight, not all the relevant thinkers I am aware of make it into this survey. Most likely, I am also leaving out pertinent and relevant works that I am unaware of from either within the western scholarly tradition or from other linguistic and cultural spheres.

[68] At least two exceptions are James Feibleman's *In Praise of Comedy* and Barry Sanders in *Sudden Glory*. Feibleman briefly acknowledges evidence of comic expression dating back to our cave ancestors, while Sanders begins his history of Judeo-Christian attitudes towards laughter with allusions to Egypt and a chapter on the Hebrew attitude to laughter. Nevertheless, taking ancient Greek can still be viewed as typical, because others, including Salvatore Attardo in *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Erich Segal in *The Death of Comedy*, Margaret Rose in *Parody: Ancient, Modern, Postmodern*, Simon Dentith in *Parody*, Andrew Stott in *Comedy*, Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism*, Arthur Asa Berger in *The Art of Comedy*

Writing, as well as the *Oxford Concise English Dictionary* and the *Oxford Companion to the English Language* each either makes ancient Greek the starting point of their studies or each makes references in their examples and case studies to either Old Greek Comedy, New Greek Comedy, or both. Out of these eleven sources, only two do not stress ancient Greece as the beginning of western academic discussion of the comic, and even Feibleman and Sanders devote major sections to the ancient Greeks.

[69] Taking ancient Greece as a starting point alters when one moves from literary studies and into cinema studies, or popular culture studies. For instance, Frank Krutinik's *Hollywood Comedians* and Will Kaufman's *The Comedian as Confidence Man*, primarily focus upon a smaller period, with the former spanning a century of cinema and the latter with a range stretching only as far back as Mark Twain. The limited temporal scope of contemporary studies points to a gap that may interest scholars. For instance, early cinema was influenced by vaudeville, which in turn was influenced by early comic forms, such as the *commedia dell'arte*. Tracing such links may be a valuable cultural enterprise. Or, Aristotle speaks of revelers wandering the countryside, which may connect to Kaufman's claim that comedian's suffer from not being taken seriously, yet are critiqued and are even seriously vilified for their criticisms of corrupt authority. The traveling stand up comedian of today may have an ancestor in Aristotle's wandering revelers. Also, for instance, consider how Hollywood romantic comedies have much in common with ancient Grecian and ancient Roman comedies. While the interdisciplinary tendency in some studies focus upon the immediate temporal framework of texts being analyzed, this analysis adapts the tendency of literary studies and begins much earlier, because this study sees important links to ancient works.

the lowly comic target that is to be laughed at, because he or she lacks self-knowledge and self-control.[70]

For Plato, the comical is rooted in envy, hence laughing is "laughing at."[71] Of the two types of pleasures, mixed or unmixed, humour is a mixed phenomenon, mixing pleasure and pain.[72] On page 624 of Jowett's translation of the *Philebus*, Plato quotes Socrates as follows: "when we laugh at the folly of our friends, pleasure, in mingling with envy, mingles with pain, for envy has been acknowledged by us to be mental pain, and laughter is pleasant; and so we envy and laugh at the same instant." For Plato, humour is created by incongruity; humour is a mixture of pleasure and pain, motivated by envy; humour is directly associated with ridicule, and, ever since, in the English-language tradition, the laughable has been often emphasized as an instance of "laughing at."[73] In *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Attardo explains Plato in the following manner: "Plato puts humor in the field of the 'ridiculous.' Whoever does not follow the Delphic Oracle's admonition 'Know thyself,' or in other words, lacks self-knowledge, is defined as ridiculous" (19). For Plato, because excessive laughter overwhelms the soul, laughter is a type of perversion or evil. The comical is unbecoming for the educated male elite; comedy is dangerous for Plato, because the emotions become wild, let loose by the intellect. In other words, the elite must demonstrate control, knowing, and seriousness. Comedy, for Plato, is ridicule, and ridicule signals a lack of respect. In *Book IV*, Plato warns: "if amusements become lawless, and the youths themselves become lawless, they can never grow up into well-conducted and virtuous citizens" (*The Literature Page*, http://www.literaturepage.com/read/therepublic-143.html). Laughing itself is a foolish activity, especially unsuitable for an intellectual, because laughter signals a loss of control over the emotions, which the guardian of the state is to have full control over – no doubt then, laughter is unbecoming for the educated elite.

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[70] Although academia fosters the persona of the serious intellectual (implying that joking indicates a lack of seriousness/depth and even ignorance), the serious (narrow-mindedly so) intellectual may also be situated as a comic target. In *Comedy Writing Techniques*, Arthur Asa Berger explains: "In commedia dell'arte one of the standard characters is the *dottore*, or pedant. These characters always have their nose buried in books and are unworldly and impractical, full of theoretical knowledge but bumblers who are unable to function in the real world. The stereotype of the absentminded and unworldly professor comes from the *dottore* figure" (48-49). When his adventures begin, *Don Quixote* is a type of pedant figure, with his reading of chivalric romances altering his ability to cope with the actual world outside of using the language and imagery of chivalric discourse. More recently, the television series from the National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC), *Frasier* presented Dr. Frasier Crane as a radio psychologist who was a type of pedant. *Frasier* is a spin-off of the earlier NBC television series *Cheers*, where surrounded by a more average cross-section of the American popular, Frasier and his wife Lilith were more easily identified as pedants, for their inappropriate verbosity within a bar setting. Frasier was out of place in *Cheers* in part, because he could not alter his language to suit his surroundings; what is even more odd is the fact that he continued to frequent a bar that did not suit his class. In *Frasier*, Crane's contradictory qualities are evident in his profession as a radio psychologist, working for a popular medium, but claiming to deliver serious and effective mental health advice. The buffoonish element of the high-class academic type or professional has provided career of roles for John Cleese, who often portrays a snob who is not as proper, intelligent, or capable, as he believes himself to be.

[71] From *In Praise of Comedy*, James Feibleman believes the official fool figure prefigures the development of formal comedy. "He was usually physically deformed and by profession remained sober, so that while his body stood as a living symbol of imperfection arousing laughter, his words must have stung by pointing satirically to the imperfections of others which had been kept, and it was hoped could remain, better concealed than his own" (19).

[72] From *In Praise of Comedy*, Feibleman declares: "Early comedy and tragedy inextricably fused in works of art mark the first recognition of the shortcomings of actual life simultaneous with the acceptance for their positive content of things just as they are. Formal comedy was certain to have been a later development than formal tragedy. Formal comedy could not have arisen until there had occurred in men's thoughts considerations of the limitations of actuality and hence of the possibility of some sort of progress" (19).

Plato's approach connects him to superiority theory primarily, but also ambivalence theory. In *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Attardo refers to Patricia Keith-Spiegel's explanation:

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[73] Plato's emphasis on laughter as "laughing at," can be connected to the way Feibleman, in *In Praise of Comedy*, describes not only the official deformed fool, as someone to laugh at for a visible imperfection, but also for early Greek works that literally laughed at specific and recognizable targets. Feibleman explains the origins of iambus in the following manner: "In the Homeric *Hymn to Demeter*, the daughter of Celeus who first makes the goddess smile is named Iambe. To "iambise" someone meant to make him the object of an invective lampoon. Early iambic poetry was certainly satirical, and its formal use was probably in association with the festivals of Demeter. The known iambic poets, Archilochus, Simonides, Hipponax, wrote satiric poetry and indulged in coarse and bitter satire and personal abuse. Certainly their work contained a large element of comedy; yet the poets conceived of shortcomings as limited affairs only, and they took no large view of comedy" (22). For Feibleman, some of the earliest poetry that can be identified as comedy are Aesop's: "The beast-fables attributed to Aesop, the hunchback, are among the first successful poetry which can be called comedy" (22).

> Keith-Spiegel (1972) notes that Plato's is the prototype of the ambivalence theory (i.e., theories that maintain that humor arises from the perception of two contrasting feelings). It is also the archetype of the aggression theories, with its mention of "envy" and its observation (a few lines before) that the ridiculous can happen to two categories of men, the strong and the feeble. Whereas the feeble cannot avenge themselves for jests, and are thus ridiculous, the strong, who can avenge themselves, are not ridiculous, but hateful. (19)

The gap between the feeble and the strong points to two other concepts from ancient Greece: arête and the Mean.[74]

Arête refers to the virtue or honour of an individual, usually coinciding with one's social status or valour achieved through battle.[75] Since the lower classes have little arête, they are objects of ridicule, while the powerful need to wield their ridicule wisely, to not be detestable, and to achieve a middle ground, or Mean. In *Sudden Glory*, Barry Sanders defines the Mean as a "balance point between two extremes, or between two emotions"

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[74] Arête and the Mean help describe the ancient conception of ideal behaviour, with arête dating as far back as Homeric descriptions of virtue and valour, and the Mean being developed more precisely in Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics*.

[75] The role of arête in Greek culture dates at least as far back as Homer's *Iliad*, where, in Book II, Agammemnon's attempt to rouse the troops through reverse psychology, does not work. Agammemnon tells his troops to leave, hoping their pride would not let them flee. Agammemnon's speech does not work and initially neither does an attempt by Odysseus to rouse the troops, advising individual chieftains with the following words: "this flight is cowardly and unworthy. Stand to your post, and bid your people also keep their places. You do not yet know the full mind of Agamemnon; he was sounding us, and ere long will visit the Achaeans with his displeasure." (http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/iliad.2.ii.html). Thersites, a common individual, speaks in favour of leaving, because all their fighting goes towards Agammemnon. Contrary to his efforts, Thersites helps rouse the troops, when Odysseus ceases upon the opportunity to shame Thersites, ""Check your glib tongue, Thersites," said be, "and babble not a word further. Chide not with princes when you have none to back you. There is no viler creature come before Troy with the sons of Atreus. Drop this chatter about kings, and neither revile them nor keep harping about going home.". . . On this he beat him with his staff about the back and shoulders till he dropped and fell a-weeping. The golden scepter raised a bloody weal on his back, so he sat down frightened and in pain, looking foolish as he wiped the tears from his eyes. The people were sorry for him, yet they laughed" (http://classics.mit.edu/Homer/iliad.2.ii.html). After this episode, Odysseus speaks and is able to rouse the troops back into battle, illustrating the importance of arête in influencing an audience. Authority demands rhetorical attention and respect, especially in a hierarchical society, such as ancient Greece. Odysseus does not simply make sense because of the strength of his argument; rather, Odysseus also makes sense because his cultural status situates him as a knowledgeable authority.

(78). Since laughter arises from a mixture of pleasure and pain, the Mean is an especially appropriate term. Sanders says: "Rhetoric kept the pans balanced by obliterating any sharp division between the jest and an earnest statement by teaching a crucial lesson: that serious truth may be delivered through witty, barbed lines" (78). Hence, the advice the younger Pliny offers Fuscus, as cited by Sanders: "Unbend your mind with poetry; I do not mean of the long and sustained order (for that can only be achieved by men of leisure), but those witty little pieces (*iocor*) which serve as proper reliefs to every degree of care and occupation" (79). For Pliny, in line with medicine, balance is healthy: "Only through laughing – even by ridiculing others – can people maintain their even temper, Pliny argues, and prevent themselves from falling into that dreaded illness, despairing *melancholia*" (79). The medical theory transforms into Jonson's comic characterization, and, by the sixteenth century, the Mean becomes "*sprezzatura*, a playful, modest gracefulness in writing, swordmanship, and in the highest of all the arts, in love" (79). While Plato connected laughter with hostility and the unbecoming, in general, laughter was connected to achieving balance in one's life, through control and critique.[76]

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[76] As is apparent, even in Plato, categorizing his ideas to one category, superiority, release, or incongruity, is difficult. Although superiority is the dominant position, or the position that becomes dominant as developed by later hostility theorists who refer to the authority of Plato, other attitudes towards humour were apparent in ancient Greece. In terms of achieving the Mean, laughter can be seen as a type of release theory, releasing excess nervous energies to help achieve balance. Also, with the Mean, laughter can be a path to self-[illegible]ion, teaching moderation. Laughter may also be re-energizing, helping one return to more serious pursuits. Even more importantly, as a mixture of pleasure and pain, laughter is a signal of greater seriousness; for instance, referring to the ancient Greeks, in *Sudden Glory*, Sanders says, "For them all laughter remained deeply embedded in tears. So whenever the Greeks mention laughter, they attempt to shape it, to hold it in check, by quickly discussing how laughter might be best used to underscore seriousness, as if unbridled derisive laughter might destroy a person, or joyous laughter prove to be a frivolous pastime, a sweet nothing. Throughout the ancient world, then, laughter became useful because of its ability to carry one beyond the moment – painful or pleasant – to a more enduring, serious point" (80). With such a description, it is possible to see the link between the sadness and humour, or humour as serious social critique, taken as most explicitly evident in satire. Early on then, one finds a basis for the comic as fool (releasing tension), as sad clown (link between the comic and melancholic) and comic critic (for harbouring serious social criticism).

I. B. Aristotle's Low Down

In his treatise on tragedy, the *Poetics*, Aristotle speaks of comedy in passing, but despite the brevity of his comments, like Plato, the way Aristotle speaks about comedy has an effect on the western conception of the comical that exists to this day. The great categorizer Aristotle offers a limited, but influential, definition of comedy in his *Poetics*, in large part, via comparative evaluation. Like Plato, Aristotle agrees that incongruity is involved with the creation of the comical, but principally, Aristotle's comparative evaluative description claims tragedy populates its drama with "high" characters, while comedy tends to emphasize "low" figures, which the audience looks down upon, implying that laughter stems from "laughing at" those who are lower than the spectator in some humorous way.

When it comes to differentiating Greek tragedy and comedy, it may also be appropriate to say that the difference between the tragic and the comic is (implicitly) a philosophical, religious, and political one. Early in western literary criticism, knowing was a key dynamic in the experience of drama. Aristotle's stress on knowledge in drama may be attributed to the Greek philosophic concern with knowledge.[77] Before Aristotle, both Socrates and Plato stress the importance of the human quest for knowledge and, indirectly, power. Socrates gains legendary status with a maxim that has been attributed to the Delphic oracle's advice to "Know thyself." The Socratic dialectic often has Socrates play the *eirôn* who dupes his *alazôn* competitor through witty trickery; early on then, the division between those who know (and who are in the know) against those who do not know marks the basis of western philosophic inquiry and indirectly, such a division locates the comic target. An eventual death by hemlock turns Socrates into an intellectual martyr in the quest for greater knowledge. Plato's hope of a world run by philosopher kings places a hierarchical value on knowledge, helping to establish the intellectual as an important and integral figure in a civilized and class-divided society. The protagonists of tragedy are divine or semi-divine mythic figures; or, they are figures wielding political or social power, such as kings, queens, and warriors; so, despite their ignorance, insults, or hubris, they cannot be laughed at – it would be socially inappropriate to do so.

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[77] Regardless of the potential influences for his emphasis, Aristotle nonetheless approaches drama as a relationship between playwright, characters, and audience; this relationship pivots upon the amount of knowledge the character or audience has access to, with the playwright determining how much information to dispense. Aristotle explains that dramatic irony is achieved through the relationship between what the character does not know and what the audience, having the privileged view of the Gods, does know. Although the myths that Greek tragedy were based upon were known by the spectators, Aristotle still advises on the careful development of insight and reversal in the protagonist in order to maximize the creation of tension and suspense leading to the climax.

Quite literally then, one of the major differences between the tragic hero and the comic hero, for the Greeks, is a matter of class, breeding, and thus a difference between the individual with greater or lesser arête. Very possibly, one could hypothesize that the mere appearance of an ugly, low comic figure on the sacred stage of mythic figures would be enough to generate laughter, or at least, create an atmosphere of comic incongruity. Interestingly, while the tragic protagonist moves from high to low, from perceived agency and control to a lack of agency, the protagonist's state of ignorance and self-destruction is not something to laugh at, even though, in strict terms, the tragic hero is someone who is not only lower than the spectators who know more, but also, as in the case of Oedipus, is stubbornly (or perhaps as Bergson would see it, rigidly or mechanically) blind to his own hubris and foolishly in violation of divine law. In other words, it is not enough to distinguish tragedy from comedy by way of highlighting the difference between the "high" tragic hero and the "low" comic figure.

For Aristotle, a low character would function in accordance with the aims of a universal plot.[78] As a result, a low character need not be low in the actual, real-world sense. Although that affinity is understandable, since, in the *Poetics*, Aristotle draws a real-world comparison point: "Comedy aims at representing men as worse, Tragedy as better than in actual life" (http://www.literatureproject.com/poetics/poetics_2.htm). Even though Aristotle's reference to average individuals warrants a real-world reference point, that reference may have served primarily as a convenient entry point into understanding dramatic characters and the audience's relation to them. At least, by the time of Theophrastus, Aristotle's successor at the Lyceum, according to Attardo's citation of Plebe, Theophrastus emphasizes a greater degree of artifice in comedy, "whereas

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[78] Aristotle claims that Crates was the first Athenian comic poet to move from using iambic to composing universal plots, influencing Attic Comedy. In "Aristotelian Comedy," Heath explains: "The term 'universal' is used in a carefully defined sense in the *Poetics*: universality is achieved when it is in accordance with necessity or probability that a person of such a kind does or says things of such a kind" (6). In other words, 'universal' refers to the universe of the story realm, the whole that consists of a causal beginning, middle, and end. As it can apply to nescience, in a comic work then, there is the possibility that a low and thus comic character may exhibit less agency than a high counterpart in a plot's causation. Getting back to Aristotle and Heath, a plot that is universally structured may target real world figures, but such targeting would be a fictional reduction, a humorous characterization adhering to the mechanics and purpose of a comic text. For Heath, individuals may be targeted in a universal plot in two ways. One, the universal plot can have characters who are the types of people "who would, necessarily or probably, abuse named contemporaries" (7). Two, victims may be brought on stage through characterizations which portray them as ridiculous and show them misbehaving; on this second method, there are two points of emphasis. One, real contemporaries and mythological figures are on the same level. Two, "Aristotle's concept of poetic universality is wholly independent of the distinction between the real and the invented" (8). For Aristotle, through Heath, it is not the poet's function to speak of what actually happened or what people are actually like, but the poet may take such a position, in a sense, claiming to speak of what actually happened or claming to know what people are actually like (8). (As Heath footnotes, a comic poet may use an invented name and still ridicule an identifiable or actual personality). So, there is a crucial distinction between the iambic writing and universal writing. The crucial point is "the nature of the relationship between the particular agents and actions, whether real or invented, which the poet incorporates into his plot: do their interrelations instantiate the general principles of necessity or probability? What is crucial, then, if a poet introduces a Lanachus or Heracles on stage, is that he does not make his plot out of miscellaneous selection of his (real or invented) actions, but out of just those actions (real of invented) which are causally coherent with each other. An iambic poet, by contrast, is free to use any set of causally unrelated events (real or invented) apt to his satirical purpose, since he is not subject to the constraints of a universalized plot-structure" (8-9). Heath concludes his section on universality with two provisos: "First, Aristotle's requirement of causal connection in comic plots should not be taken so rigidly as to exclude designed inconsequentiality, where that either is obtrusive and laughable in its own right, or else unobtrusively helps to make the lay as a whole work better" (10). Second, "the requirement of causal integration applies precisely to the comic *plot*, not to the comic *text*, so that Aristotle's account is consistent with the digressive textual elements that one finds plentiful in Aristophanes" (10).

Aristotle had maintained that comedy had to be realistic" (*Linguistic Theories of Humor*, 22). Comedy's use of stereotype, flat characters, exaggeration, and other such distortions lends support to Theophrastus. In general, within the realm of dramatic aesthetics, real world standards may not be extensively applicable to the stage, or as Heath argues within different types of stages (the comic, rhetorical, or everyday). In "Aristotelian Comedy," Heath references Aristotle's distinction between appropriate language for the comic stage and appropriate language for polite social exchange. Because of prevailing social hierarchies, the affiliation between looking down at comic characters in fictional texts and "laughing at" the target of a joke or ridicule in actual life have a link most demonstrable in ethnic humour. In such humour, a joke's skeleton is fleshed out by a real-world target group, which depending upon the teller, audience, and context, may demonstrate a range of real-world impact, from playful teasing, wordplay, and reflexive play with stereotyped conventions to a more deliberate intent to demean, uphold stereotypes, or to advance a prejudiced political worldview.

Comic theory, in terms of the definition of comedy especially, begins with a Greek bias towards emphasizing the class-based honour or lack thereof of the key figures populating a play; similarly, comic theory also begins by stressing superiority, or laughing at those who have little or no arête. Since the animal world is less likely to be capable of arête, a typical comic device involves comparing humans to "lesser" species.[79]

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[79] It is small surprise then that some derogatory terms (such as dog or donkey), caricatures, and certain cartoons of animals exist. Referring to Sir Thomas Browne from 1690, in *The Art of Comedy Writing*, Berger quotes, "When men's faces are drawn with resemblance to some other animals, the Italians call it to be drawn in Caricaturia." Berger defines caricatures as visual representations "in which a person's face is drawn in an exaggerated manner (yet the resemblance is kept) for the purpose of ridiculing the individual" (10). In *In Praise of Comedy*, Feibleman believes: "The use of comparisons between animals and humans, often to the detriment of the latter, has been a characteristic of comedy from earliest times to the present" (23). The technique of bringing the high (humans) low (animals) is a common one of various comical categories; however, the comparison can work in the reverse as well. For instance, dogs and horses may be

However, in Aristophanes it is also not enough to say that the characters are funny because they are low in the sense of being socially low. For instance, ~~while~~ *Lysistrata* presents several female characters – (who would have been considered low, not unlike placing a slave figure on stage) – the play also presents elderly members of the government and of course, the husbands/soldiers of the women on a sex strike. For one, the elderly officials and the soldiers are figures who have some degree of social power within the actual ancient Greek world; so, this comedy includes characters that audiences would not completely regard as lower-than-average within the social realm. Typically, comedies have authority figures, or high figures, as objects of ridicule.[80] In a way,

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considered honourable creatures by their owners or because of the animal's breeding, feats in battle, and so on. As a further aside, currently, many sports teams take the names of wild animals to embody the grace, ferociousness, and roaring energy of bears and tigers. However, in the National Hockey League (NHL), there are the Anaheim *Mighty Ducks*, even though ducks are not normally considered vicious beasts; in this case, the team is named after a Disney children's film, whose use of the adjective "Mighty" helps distinguish them from those less powerful birds of the quacking variety. On an even more disturbing note, the wild savagery of nature is extended to the exotic labelling of First Nations people, where many sports teams also name themselves after native tribes or communities, such as the Chicago Blackhawks, the Atlanta Braves, and the Edmonton Eskimos. There are the Boston Celtics, but that team name is associated with the cultural history of the city; also, it is still more of a widespread phenomenon to associate Native American and Native Canadian tribes with teams. Other cultural groups are not similarly exalted/demeaned; for instance, there is no sports team called "The New Jersey Jews." Back to the use of animal or insect names, even such name-calling is not always derogatory. For instance, calling an individual, a lion, has positive associations, while calling someone a toad, a rat, a flea, a gnat, or a pig, would, under many circumstances, be considered negative. Nevertheless, there still exists parents who refer to their own children as "little piggies," or even couples who endearingly refer to one another as bulbous hard-shelled vegetables of the squash family, such as "pumpkin."

[80] Similarly, Greek deities may behave in a "low" fashion, or disgraceful, manner. Rather than exhibiting the grace and decorum that Plato advised for the educated elite, Greek gods are often "out of control" emotionally, fuelled by revenge, hate, lust, and so on. However, their behaviour may be excused by fate. Despite the power of the gods, they cannot control fate, so in a theological sense from a contemporary layperson's perspective, because they lack the power of the fates, the Greek gods would be "lower" than fate. The Greek relationship to the divine is complex and by current standards, seemingly contradictory, because although they may behave in foolish ways, the Gods are not to be disrespected, which, when it occurs, can be regarded as humorous. For instance, Zeus, the most powerful of all the Gods, could be in trouble with his wife. The dynamic of a wife scolding her husband, for instance, is also a comic device, a reversal of power in patriarchal Greek society. So, the possibility for laughing at Zeus is there. However, according to Homer and Plato, disrespecting the Gods is taboo. As a result, we have three possibilities. The first two are either we laugh anyway, or, we do not laugh. In not laughing, we respect Zeus's situation, displaying a tolerance (as opposed to ridiculing) for the behavior that led to angering his wife. We may even laugh at Helen for upsetting the patriarchal power structure. A third possibility is we do both. For Plato, laughter is simply "laughing at." However, laughing can be a mixed phenomenon in way other than simply mixing pain and pleasure. If one watches another being scolded by his partner, it could result in

figures of high rank in the social world make for better comic targets than those deemed socially lower, because the high figure is expected to behave in more noble ways than a lowly figure.[81] In *Lysistrata*, the higher-ranking male figures do behave in a low fashion, or are presented in what would be considered embarrassing in the actual world; for instance, the sex-starved soldiers on stage are distraught, emotionally limp, while another part of them is much less limp, making them appropriate objects of ridicule.[82] In addition, to a certain degree, audiences may identify with the object of ridicule, because

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nervous laughter, sympathetic laughter, empathetic laughter, and laughter at Hera for challenging the most powerful patriarch – or, any combination of these types of laughter. There are probably other motivations for laughing at Zeus and Hera that cannot all be covered in a lengthy footnote. (For instance, by contemporary North American standards, it is funny that Hera is both Zeus's wife and sister; it is funny that such a vengeful wife as Hera has as her favourite animal, a cow. It is funny that Zeus can be so repeatedly stupid and sex-obsessed). The main point here is that laughter is not simply "laughing" at someone with lesser social standing or lesser agency. There are other types of laughter, even mixed laughter, where audiences may laugh for several different reasons at once. Moreover, laughter often depends upon the taste or vantage point of the audience. Although there is no way to test this, contemporary audiences may find the Zeus and Hera relationship funnier than ancient Greek audiences.

[81] For instance, while we may laugh at a drunkard vigorously scratching his naked buttocks in public, it may be funnier when the Queen does it – so long as the drunkard does not mind.

[82] Factoring in the stamina of a hormone-raging and virile youth, if you see an erect penis on a soldier in act one, you would expect it to go off in act one . . . two or three times . . . before his female partner is even undressed. Please note that jokes (however pathetic) such as these, within a thesis, may help to lower the writer's credibility, which illustrates how pervasive and longstanding the critical attitude towards the comical is. A solemn approach to a serious work, such as an academic thesis, may be linked to both Plato and Aristotle in the following ways. Plato values the educated male elite as leaders of a society, so any public behaviour that lightens the image of the serious scholar is unadvisable. Aristotle divides the rhetoricians ability to persuade into three categories, ethos, pathos, and logos. In his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle explains: "Of the modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word there are three kinds. The first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself. Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible" (http://www.public.iastate.edu/~honeyl/Rhetoric/rhet1-2.html). The personal character of an academic should be one that displays respectful seriousness; the audience should be placed into a state of studious awe; the work itself should be populated with as many references to other academics and of lesser importance, to the principle texts under examination. Traditionally, owing to the elite, pure, and uncorrupt ideal of the university, academic writing should be serious, complicated and a demonstration of one's advanced vocabulary, extensive reading, and ability to footnote. This overall attitude may, in part, be to sustain the power of the educated elite, as well as to downplay the more human elements of the university, such as power politics, gossip, and other sorts of unprofessional behaviour, such as emotion. Certainly, the educated elite should not be exhibiting behaviour reserved for the lowly masses, because the elite are those with the (possibly natural) brainpower to rise to upper echelons of university breeding. An excellent and humorous articulation of academic writing style can be found in the preface to *Don Quixote*.

imagining oneself in a similar situation is, in part, what makes certain situations recognizable as embarrassing or inappropriate.

After all, Aristotle specifies that the species of ugly that is used in comedy is not that which causes pain or destruction, but that which is disgraceful and laughable, and grace is a social phenomenon. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle declares:

> Comedy is, as we have said, an imitation of characters of a lower type, not, however, in the full sense of the word bad, the Ludicrous being merely a subdivision of the ugly. It consists in some defect or ugliness which is not painful or destructive. To take an obvious example, the comic mask is ugly and distorted, but does not imply pain. (http://www.literatureproject.com/poetics/poetics_5.htm)[83]

If audiences did not understand what being sexually aroused in public meant (and if audiences did not fear such laughable disgrace), then audiences would not find it embarrassing, and in this case, ridiculous enough to laugh at and with. Accordingly, there must be some degree of imagined identification with the ridiculed target, namely, not wanting to be in that position.[84] Further, it is not simply a matter at laughing at one of respected social rank behaving in what would be considered embarrassing in the actual world. In terms of the visual humour, there is an incongruity in the soldier's public role as an imposing and threatening figure and the soldier's private desire for sex. His private desire is on full display in a public space, allowing for visual comic incongruity. Also, there is a pun at work. The erect shaft is analogous to a raised sword, the weapon of the soldier. Quite possibly, there is even room for politics. The soldier exerts power over others because of his weapon, his sword, while he exerts power over his wife through his fifth appendage. When there is no outlet for his sexual lust, the soldier is ridiculous; by extension, no pun intended, when there is no outlet via war, the soldier is out of place. Just as an unruly woman would be a threat to the soldier, a soldier without a war may be a problem for the government. The politics may be taken as conservative or subversive, or anywhere between such poles. Conservative, if contemporary performers emphasize the importance of sustaining the system of public and private roles.[85] Wives listen to their husbands, soldiers to their government. Subversive, for instance, if contemporary twenty-first century performers emphasize the confusion caused by Lysistrata's sex strike, exposing how accepted social and gender categories may not be natural, and how

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[83] In this translation, the word Ludicrous is used, but historically, both Plato and Aristotle become associated with identifying the comical as the ridiculous. The distinction between the ridiculous and the ludicrous is important, because later theorists that emphasize the incongruity element, such as Mark Akenside, Francis Hutcheson, and James Beattie call for a distinction between the ridiculous and the ludicrous, with Beattie arguing that Aristotle was actually speaking only of the ridiculous.

[84] The level of imagined identification with a low character, a comic target, or highly ridiculed character is difficult, if not impossible, to identify concretely, because the identification would depend upon the way a reader or viewer engages with a text. In general, however, it can be assumed that some identification is taking place with the concept of ridicule at least. Assuming also that one does not want to be ridiculed, that state of laughing at one who is, then, may partly be fuelled by a fear of being ridiculed. A sort of "It's better that it's him or her, than me" scenario may describe a listener's relation to the joke's butt. So, laughing at a stupid person in a joke is not simply pushing that stupid target away, in order to exert one's group affiliation with smarter people. On some level, that fear of being considered stupid and excluded from the group – that identification with the target – is what makes the joke work. Having said this, identification is also a matter of degree. The comedy in Hamlet's encounter with the gravedigger is of a heavier, more philosophical feel than the comedy in a *Tom and Jerry* cartoon. While *Hamlet* conjures up an emotionally charged atmosphere, bringing the handling of sensitive emotional states to the fore, *Tom and Jerry* turns life, death, and injury into a game lacking verisimilitude. Nevertheless, despite its high degree of artificialness – it is, after all, a cartoon – *Tom and Jerry* still calls for some audience

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identification, through the visceral thrill of the hunt, the playfulness of practical joking, or the dynamics of hiding, fearing discovery, or outwitting another in a "cat and mouse" game.

[85] Taking into account the predominately adult male audiences of Greek theatre and the belief in a natural social hierarchy (that the male audience had a vested interest in), chances are *Lysistrata* was politically conservative, with the female characters serving as adequate targets. However, *Lysistrata* and notions of comedy cannot be left in the past. *Lysistrata* continues to be performed and as with most dramatic texts, the staging of a play, the dynamic of the audience, and the overall cultural atmosphere alters the way a play works, especially a comedy, because a comedy depends on a wide variant (in terms of the sense of humour and the way humorous appreciation is expressed) within the audience. Any specific audience member has his or her own unique sense of humorous taste, while overall, a total audience may be more or less expressive (laughing, clapping, cheering, heckling, or yawning) than another audience. Cultural, political, and social attitudes change, so it is necessary that older texts are seen for more than fulfilling Aristotle's paragraph on comedy in his *Poetics*, and it is necessary to widen our understanding of comedy beyond its funhouse mirror reflection of tragedy, embodiment of low figures, and almost exclusive characterization of laughter as ridiculing.

war has been a highly gendered activity, often at the expense of the female voice.[86] In between, if a contemporary showing chooses to aim for what may be more complex, in the sense of not allowing for a clear political slant, but doing whatever is best to sustain the unexpected shifts that characterize comic technique. Because early scholars, such as Aristotle, seem to be influenced by the class biases of their age, the notion of the stage as a place for sacred religious ceremony and seriousness, as well as the time's belief in arête, it is important to qualify the ancient Greek conception of comedy as rooted within a specific cultural, political, and social sphere.[87]

Even taking such a qualification, Greek comedy during the classical period may not have been exclusively perceived in the ways that Plato and Aristotle describe or more appropriately, in the way in which subsequent scholars have emphasized them. For instance, in "Aristotelian Comedy," Malcolm Heath questions "the decorum assumption." For Heath, critics have assumed "that the ethical standards applicable in ordinary social intercourse are equally applicable to comedy; but this assumption is questionable" (1). Heath offers two pieces of evidence against "the decorum assumption." One, Heath says that in *The Politics*, Aristotle states exceptions to using indecent language, claiming certain religious cultures, iambus (lampoon), and comedy may use indecent language (2). According to Heath, Aristotle qualifies this allowance by advising that comedy be restricted to an audience of mature males, "whose moral education will have rendered them immune to its potentially harmful effects" (2). Two, Health claims Aristotle distinguishes between poetical and political (includes the ethical) correctness. Consequently, to determine "whether something said or done in a poem is said or done well (by poetic criteria) one must consider not only its moral character, but also the agent or speaker and the circumstances in which he acts or speaks" (2). Heath cites Aristotle as defining comedy as a "representation of morally inferior people," and so concludes that when creating comedy, one must present morally inferior people "doing and saying morally inferior things" (3). The aesthetic parameters of comedy prefer vulgar language and foolish behaviour. Hence, Heath insists: "By Aristotle's own poetical criteria, therefore, the contents of comedy must deviate from the ethical norms of polite social intercourse" (3). To ridicule in comedy or on stage is not the same as informal joking (using ridicule) in actual life or the informal but deliberate ridiculing of another person in actual life.[88] Moreover, although there may be commonalities, to ridicule on the ancient

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[86] To this day, war narratives, whether in literature, via photography, or on television and film, tend to be populated with male characters in the key roles of protagonist and antagonist. Novels such as *Like Water For Chocolate* and *The English Patient*, as well as their corresponding film adaptations, provide an alternative voice in the tradition of the epic romance (or historical war romance) by, for instance, stressing the female narrative perspective, as in the former, or privileging female characters as central narrative figures, as in the latter. An even more recent example as both novel and film, *Cold Mountain* also offers more narrative space for the female experience of the war.

[87] The presence of stylized masks, an emphasis on mime, the structure of the stage, the use of special effects, and the presence of a Chorus points out just how peculiar Greek drama was to the ancient stage. While simply taking a literary understanding of ancient drama may willingly overlook most of such elements as matters of performance and staging, attention to stage directions and especially the Chorus, would still stand out.

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[88] The social notion of ridicule or abuse may be easily confused with the comic device of ridicule and abuse, because often, comedy references the actual world, explores taboos, or offends real world levels of taste and decorum. In one way, ridicule through a parody, satire, or hoax is not the same as ridicule that is more socially damaging or politically persuasive. For instance, the hoax delivered by Allan Sokal (in his essay "Transgressing the Boundaries: Toward a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity") is not the same as being ridiculed by a colleague or by someone with greater social power over you within the actual working world. Sokal's hoax is public and risks being discovered. An authority figure evaluating a student unfairly, spreading unsubstantiated rumours, engaging in self-serving gossip, or ridiculing someone directly is a clear abuse of the authority figure's power. Moreover, Sokal's act is mirrored by a long history of hoaxes in science that have had a much more destructive effect on culture. For instance, pseudo-scientific notions of race and gender have little logical merit, but they nonetheless still influence the way race and gender are understood. Sokal's essay embarrasses some editors and pokes fun at a style of writing, whereas theories of racism have justified slavery and social hierarchies, or led to genocide. In the past, theories of race were intended as true, or if not true, intended to justify hate politics or validate the rule of those in power, whereas Sokal's essay is a fiction, a joke, a trick played on undiscriminating editors. Nevertheless, at times, the confusion between ridiculing in the social realm and fictive realm may be warranted; Sokal's essay, as a hoax, exists between humorous fiction and the actual world of academic publishing. Similarly, sexist, racist, or homophobic ridicule may be distasteful for some and highly destructive for others. Nevertheless, the success of a joke depends upon context, speaker, and intent -- the interaction between the fictional or quasi-fictional source (the joke) and the real world receiver (the audience). A racist joke may be reflexive or self-deprecatory, defusing some of its incendiary charge. In

Greek stage is not exactly the same as ridiculing on other stages, over time and across differing cultural and political frameworks.

Nevertheless, the ideas first postulated in ancient Greece have echoed throughout time into present-day English-language understandings of comedy. According to Cuddon's *The Penguin Dictionary of Literary Terms*, by the 4th century, the class distinction of the characters of tragedy and comedy is sustained, through the descriptions of Evanthius, Diomedes, and Donatus, who claim comedy is the domain of average characters, as opposed to the "high" kings, heroes, and generals of tragedy.[89] According to Cuddon, during the Middle Ages, descriptions of comedy remain rather vague and general. For instance, Vincent de Beauvais in *Speculum maius triplex* defines comedy as a poem moving from a sad beginning to a happy end. Sustaining the Aristotelian method

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addition, a joke's success depends upon who is saying the joke, the group affiliation of the comedian, as well as the comedian's persona, level of stardom, and the comedian's delivery. Chris Rock can, more or less, get away with using the term "nigger;" Lenny Bruce and George Carlin may even get away with it, especially if they are playing a character or if they are commenting upon the political usage of the word. While of the three, only Rock is an African-American comedian, all three are known for their use of impolite language; moreover, they are all stars with well known personae, so cable television audiences may be less shocked or offended than if an unknown non-African-American comedian, while not doing an impersonation, uses the term "nigger" to a non-racist studio crowd. On that note, Bill Cosby saying "nigger," may also be problematic, because despite being African-American, his act is not riddled with profanity and his persona is more of a fatherly (now grandfatherly) storyteller than that of a fast-talking, urban youth. Chris Rock is associated with hip hop music (through the film *CB4*, the 1999 comedic song "No Sex in the Champagne Room," and the popular rap music references in his act) where profanity is more prevalent, whereas Bill Cosby is associated with jazz music (being a musician himself), where profanity is not prevalent. Interestingly, whereas a ranting in-your-face style is associated with rap, a comic playfulness is associated with jazz. Even amongst comedians then, there is a variation in terms of what is considered acceptable abusive language. Please note, even though Cosby here is associated with jazz, Cosby is too much of an American father-figure type to be considered jazz, at least according to the way Herman Gray configures black masculinity and jazz. In the 1995 *Callaloo* article, "Black Masculinity and Visual Culture," referring to the jazz man, Gray says, "As a "different" sign of the masculine he was policed as much as he was celebrated and exoticized by white men and women alike. Policed as a social threat because he transgressed the social role assigned to him by the dominant culture and celebrated as the "modern primitive" because he embodied and expressed a masculinity that explicitly rejected the reigning codes of propriety and place. Drugs, sexism, pleasure, excess, nihilism, defiance, pride, and the cool pose of disengagement were all a part of the style, personality, vision, and practice of an assertive heterosexual black masculinity that could not be confined within the dominant cultural logic" (401-402). Seen in this manner, Richard Pryor would be more associated with jazz than Cosby, even though, unlike Cosby, Pryor is not a jazz musician.

[89] This paragraph's references to attitudes of comedy after Aristotle are all based upon Cuddon's entry of comedy, up until the paragraph's referencing of *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*.

of comparing comedy to tragedy, Johannes Januensis in *Catholicon*, says tragedy uses a lofty style and ends with misfortune, while comedy uses a humble style and ends with joy. However brief, Aristotle's method of describing the origins of the word comedy and the differentiation between comedy and tragedy (especially characters and endings) remains the preferred way to speak of comedy. That is, Aristotle divides tragedy and comedy into comparative categories, where one uses high characters and the other uses low characters. Although tragedy is more valuable than comedy, both forms of drama are social correctives via catharsis.[90] In tragedy, the hubris of the character leads to a downfall, whereas in comedy, the lack of self-knowledge in comic characters make them ridiculous examples of individuals unable to achieve an ideal Mean.

I. C. Ridicule as Weapon and Educator: Cicero, Quintillian, and Horace

Compared to Plato and in the tradition of Aristotle, Cicero and Quintillian, by offering pragmatic advice, treat the comical in a more positive vein; humour is a powerful weapon, with well-timed ridicule as its piercing blade. Humour is an integral part of successful oratory; so, the comical is valued, but only within the educated mouths of male public speakers. In terms of contributing to the study of the comic, according to

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[90] In *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Attardo mentions another comparative point between tragedy and comedy, the sublime. Longinus, from the first century AD, regards the comic sublime as "a parallel of the "serious" sublime. The author notes that "hyperboles are not addressed only toward what is greater but also toward what is lesser" (*The Sublime*, XXXVIII 6; Arieti 1985: 191-192n). This idea will be found later in Quintilian (*Inst. Or.* VIII, 6, 67). In terms of comic catharsis, in "Aristotle's Theory of Comedy," Masahiro Kitano identifies three types of comic catharsis. One, the comic catharsis of action is an error with no bad intent. Two, the universal (beginning, middle, and end of a plot) element differentiates laughing at a dramatic comedy from laughing at "friends," because of envy, as Plato saw it. Moreover, the universal artifice of comedy over rides envy, providing a morally acceptable place to laugh at the faults of others. In Kitano's words, "It does not have painful element mixed with pleasure" (8). Three, the "ridiculousness aroused in the audience in the theatre is purged by the comic laughter. The arousal and purgation of the ridiculous in comedy is useful for the realization of the mean in relation to the ridiculous" (8). In other words, comic catharsis helps to balance individuals between the buffoon and the boor, or the playboys and killjoys, as termed by Harry Levin in his *Playboys and Killjoys: An Essay on the Theory and Practice of Comedy*.

Attardo in *Linguistic Theories*, Cicero presents what is the first known "attempt at a taxonomy of humor from a linguistic point of view" (28). In the next line, Attardo assesses the taxonomy, arguing: "If we compare the taxonomy to contemporary taxonomies (see ch. 3), it is amazing how little progress has been made" (28). A well-timed ridiculing (of another's message within a debate or the humorous critique of another person's ideas within one's own speech) has undertones of satire. According to *The Development of Comic Theory*, Paul Mallory Haberland says Cicero divides wit into two types, narrative and barbed: "Irony is associated with natural wit, whereas raillery, or stinging invectives which may be employed to advantage against an enemy, may be learned through examples and practice in debating" (20). Like Plato and Aristotle, Cicero links laughter with derision. In *Book 6*, chapter three, for Quintilian, barring offensiveness and ensuring the speaker sustains his dignity, humour is also a useful means to gain an attentive audience: "1. VERY different from this is the talent which, by exciting laughter in the judge, dispels melancholy affections, diverting his mind from too intense application to the subject before it, recruiting at times its powers, and reviving it after disgust and fatigue" (http://lee.engl.iastate.edu/6/chapter3.html). In this way, Quintilian is like Horace who, according to Attardo in *Linguistic Theories*, believed "comedy could 'educate,' that is, present an idea in an accessible and pleasant way" (33). Horace's stress on the didactic loosely links to satire's didactic tendency, although the satire of Jonathan Swift may not be accessible or pleasant to many, unless one has a craving for Kentucky Fried Children.

I. D. Ridicule, Rhetoric, the Renaissance, and Humour

The Renaissance rediscovery Aristotle's *Poetics* spawned several commentaries. Attardo explains: "In 1508, Aldus Manuntius in Venice printed the first modern edition of the Greek text of the *Poetics*, a decade after Lorenzo Valla's Latin translation, and it had a great impact on literary criticism almost immediately" (*Linguistic Theories*, 34). According to Attardo, from 1511 to 1572, Vettore Fausto, Franciscus Robortellus, Vincenzo Maggi (or Madius), Girolamo Muzio, Giulio Cesare Scaligero, Giangiorgio Trissino, Lodovico Castelvetro, and Bernardo Pino Da Cagli wrote significant treatises on humour inspired by the re-discovery of Aristotle. Of note, Trissino expands Aristotle's notion of ugliness, claiming it "does not mean only physical ugliness, but also any "improper" (i.e., socially unconscionable) behavior (lying, ungratefulness)" (41). Similarly, Pino does not "link the idea of humor with "evil" but only with social inappropriateness" (44). Lodovico Castelvetro's commentary on Aristotle is set apart from the rest, because Castelvetro "develops a theory of humor independently" (42).[91] According to *The Development of Comic Theory*, Haberland says Castelvetro "distinguishes between the laughter of innocent joy, the laughter of ridicule arising when men are deceived or have physical deformities, and the private laughter which is associated with carnal pleasure" (33). Although Castelvetro makes a distinction between innocent laughter and laughter of ridicule, "Thomas Hobbes in England combines Madius' element of surprise with Castelvetro's sense of superiority over the deceived in his explanation of laughter as originating in sudden glory" (32).[92] The sudden glory concept, since Hobbes, becomes a prominent way of understanding the comical, crystallizing ideas dating as far back as Plato and Aristotle into a coherent theory.

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[91] In *Linguistic Theories*, Attardo lists Castelvetro's contributions as follows: "Castelvetro lists four sources of laughter: 1. the sight of people that are dear to us; 2. deceptions of others than ourselves. This can happen because of four reasons: (a) ignorance of customs, madness, drunkenness (b) ignorance of arts or sciences, or boasting (c) wilful misinterpretations and witty retorts (d) chance and intentional deceptions 3. evil and physical disgrace presented under cover 4. sex" (42). Attardo makes special note of the fourth category, because "it predates Freud by a full 330 years. Castelvetro claims that everything pertaining to "the pleasures of the flesh" is funny; however, Castelvetro continues, the genitalia or "lascivious unions" are not funny when openly presented, but rather embarrassing" (42).

Related to the Renaissance value of education, humour theory emerges through Ben Jonson. Aristotle, along with Hippocrates and Plato, influence the medical concept of four bodily humours, which in turn influences Jonson's application of the basic classification of comedic character types.[93] In the general sense of the term, according to *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, humour was originally "a mental disposition or temperament," and more currently, refers to "a disposition towards pleasantry, often realized in the enjoyment of anecdotes, jokes, puns, repartee, riddles, wisecracks, and witticisms" (486). Hence, we can speak of a "sense of humour." The theory of four bodily humours has its distant origins in the ancient Greek classification of the four elements, air, earth, fire, and water, attributable to Empedocles. The corresponding four humours, or bodily liquids, have been associated with Theophrastus, but it is not until Hippocrates that the four humours developed into the system that Galen will inherit, who helps influence medicine throughout the Middle Ages, in Europe and the Middle East. Presumably, the medical traditions of ancient Egypt and Mesopatamia influenced Hippocrates.[94] Originally, with the humour theory of medicine, the body and mind are not split into the dualistic system that Plato and Aristotle will help to create. Rather, good health was achieved through a holistic balance of all the humours, complete with spiritual understanding. The Hippocratic system travels through the Arab world, where it becomes known as "Unani," from the Arabic Ionian, for Greek. Through the additions made by Al-Razi (Rhazes), Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and Ibn Rushd (Averroes) amongst others, Arabic and European medical practices and theories mix more explicitly during the Crusades. By the Renaissance and up until the nineteenth century, the theory of humours remains commonplace in western medicine. Since the theory was that different organs produced particular vapours that affected one's temperament (and if imbalanced, then disease), then the body needed to be brought back into balance through changes in diet, adjustments in environment, and, everyone's favourite, blood-letting.[95]

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[92] Agreeing with Haberland's praise for Madius, *Comic Theory in the Sixteenth Century*, Marvin T. Herrick claims: "The most elaborate discussion of the risible in the sixteenth century, so far as I know, is an essay, *De Ridiculis, which Madius published with his commentary on Aristotle Poetics in 1550*" (41).

[93] In the twentieth century, Eco and Pirandello try to distinguish between comedy and humour, but the distinction is largely unconnected to the Renaissance theory of humours.

[94] There may even be a parallel between the four humours concept and Frye's theory. According to Hippocrates, the four humours are linked to not only various humours, but also the seasons; for Aristotle, the seasons were linked to four types of happiness. Spring was associated with air, blood, and sensuous pleasure; winter was associated with water, phlegm, and acquiring assets; summer was associated with fire, yellow bile and moral virtue; autumn was associated with earth, black bile, and logical investigation.

Jonson's application of the theory of imbalanced humours to character types in drama exaggerated a well-established medical diagnosis method. While humours have been used to describe dramatic characters (such as the melancholic Danish prince), it is interesting to note how the idea of imbalanced humours has been more commonly associated with comedic figures. Certainly, tragic protagonists, such as Oedipus, must have some sort of excess vapours seeping into their brains, but such reductive readings of tragic characters are not as critically common as with comic characters.[96] In part, this is because Jonson was writing a comedy. In addition, this may have to do with the attitude that comedic characters are more easily understood as classifiable types or stock figures. Also, it may be that comedic characters are "imbalanced," and thus more suitable to be

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Frye's categories of comedy (spring), romance (summer), tragedy (autumn), and irony/satire (winter) may be loosely inspired by such a schema of associations.

[95] Imbalance and the comic are also loosely connected to Spencer's release theory and Freud's theory.

[96] Or, more appropriately, there is no commonplace theory (that classifies different types of tragic heroes according to a tragic counterpart to Humour theory) that I am aware of.

diagnosed as such by their superiors in the audience, while more tragic heroes elicit our sympathizes, rather than our diagnoses.

Regardless of the comparative relationship to tragedy, Jonson's work is based upon earlier conceptions of comic characters, made by both Aristotle and his successor, Theophrastus. Following Aristotle as head of the Lyceum, Theophrastus (ca. 373 to ca. 287 BC) (of the Peripatetic school), who had studied under both Plato and Aristotle (commonly regarded as Aristotle's favourite student), helped institutionalize Aristotelian thought.[97] According to Attardo in *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, because of his introduction of comic characters, Theophrastus signals a major contribution to humour studies. In addition, Theophrastus emphasizes comedy as fictional, not connected to verisimilitude, clarifying the distance between comic aesthetics and real-world standards. Interestingly, as Attardo point out, "Theophrastus's contribution to the theory of humor has had little recognition and little significant mention of his ideas has been found in the "humor research" literature" (22). The influence relates to ancient comedy through at least one playwright, since Menander was one famous student of Theophrastus.

The humour theory of comic characterization has links to both one of the earliest thinkers of the comic, Aristotle, and one of the more recent, Bergson.[98] Aristotle's conception has been covered, but what can be added is the assumed incongruous relationship with an imagined ideal, or more balanced, figure. A comic character is funny not only because he or she can be ridiculed as a low figure, but also because his or her fault makes the character an aberration of balanced health. While it is impolite to laugh at sick people, the unhealthy character theory becomes an explicitly social corrective, as Bergson, a millennia or two later, notices and develops, Hobbes's notion of sudden glory with comic characterization.

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[97] Apparently, Theophrastus was originally Tyrtamus, but Aristotle nicknamed him Theophrastus, because of his skill at public speaking. Accordingly, the close link between rhetoric and comedy may also predate the work of Cicero and Quintilian. In terms of the various characters, *Theophrastus, Herodas, Sophran.*, edited and translated by Jeffrey Rusten and I. C. Cunningham displays thirty characters of Theophrastus, each of whom are typified by a single fault.

[98] In *Comedy*, Stott mentions the contributions of Donatus and Meredith. Explaining the contributions of Donatus, Stott declares: "By the fourth century AD, the idea of comedy as an instructive literary form takes shape in the work of Donatus, a grammarian who taught at Rome, and who wrote enormously influential remarks on the comedies of Terence, works he would have never seen performed and would have only known as texts. Under these sterile conditions, Donatus declared comedy to be essentially didactic, mirroring everyday life and schooling us in practical ethics. He also emphasized the academic qualities of comedy, arguing that good comedy should be built according to sound rhetorical principles (Herrick, 1950: 65). Donatus' scholarly and moralistic method fortified comedy with some of the technical respectability of tragedy, and the principal arguments of comic theory from the Renaissance onwards are based on his

I. E. Sudden Gloriosus in England

Following Plato's proposed motivation of envy, according to *The Development of Comic Theory*, Haberland believes "Hobbes took a disparaging view of the phenomenon of laughter and considered it one of man's worst attributes. Man indulges in laughter for the sake of boosting his own ego at the expense of others who are perhaps less fortunate" (38). In *The Leviathan*, Hobbes describes "sudden glory" as follows:

> Sudden glory is the passion which maketh those grimaces called laughter; and is caused either by some sudden act of their own that pleaseth them; or by the apprehension of some deformed thing in another, by comparison whereof they suddenly applaud themselves. And it is incident most to them that are conscious of the fewest abilities in themselves; who are forced to keep themselves in their own favour by observing the imperfections of other men. (http://oregonstate.edu/instruct/phl302/texts/hobbes/leviathan-a.html#CHAPTERVI)

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ideas" (5-6). Explaining Meredith's contribution, Stott says, Meredith enlarges comedy's didactic function "by personifying comedy as a benign spirit monitoring human behaviour" (6). For Donatus and Meredith, "laughing at" is not hateful, so much as a necessary means to identifying and correcting vice, for the moral betterment of society. Hence, there is both a conservative and subversive potential with comedy: comedy can be conservative, if the moral values being preserved is those of tradition and of those in power; comedy can be subversive, if those in positions of authority are critiqued.

Inheriting classical Greek, ancient Roman rhetorician, and Renaissance theories, Hobbes's concept crystallizes a dominant western view of the laughable. The comical as the successful delivery of ridicule over a target is a major force in the history of comic theory, despite subsequent efforts to revise such an overshadowing claim.

As early as 1711, according to Haberland in *The Development of Comic Theory*, the Earl of Shaftesbury "takes strong issue with the prevalent Hobbesian attitude towards the comic. Shaftesbury defends wit in good taste as a means of separating truth from falsehood and virtue from vice" (39). Wit is educational, "ridding society of the ludicrous vices" (40). On Shaftesbury's side, Mark Akenside also believes "the comic muse should be called upon to rid society of its vices" (41). Countering Shaftesbury, John Brown's "On Ridicule, considered as a Test of Truth," in *Essays on the Characteristics*, as examined by Schade, "amounts to a vigorous attack on Shaftesbury's contention that ridicule may be employed as a test of truth" (42). Haberland says Brown claims "Wit inspires gaiety rather than contempt" (42). Moreover, "In contrast to Shaftesbury, Brown sees ridicule as a means of disguising the truth and promoting vice. He doubts the wisdom of the then popular use of ridicule in exposing and condemning men's faults" (42). John Morreall in "The Rejection of Humor in Western Thought" refers to Francis Hutcheson in "Reflections Upon Laughter," to argue[99]:

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[99] According to the *Thoemmes Continuum: A History of Ideas* (http://www.thoemmes.com/index.htm), Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746) "made a series of important contributions to moral philosophy and aesthetics in the eighteenth century, influencing the direction of argument throughout the British Isles, particularly in Scotland, where he contributed to the development of what is now called the Scottish Enlightenment, as well as overseas, notably in the American colonies, where his work found an audience in colonial educational institutions and among revolutionary figures" (http://www.thoemmes.com/encyclopedia/hutcheson.htm). Interestingly, both Beattie (1753-1803) and Hutcheson are associated with the Scottish Enlightenment, whereas Hobbes (1588-1679) is associated with England, so there could be some element of difference in terms of the humour of the different subcultures of the British Isles. Or, as the *Thommes Continuum*'s encyclopaedia entry for Hobbes puts it, it may have also been fashionable to attack Hobbes: "*Leviathan* attracted much hostile attention on its publication and

> If Hobbes were right, Hutcheson argues, then two conclusions would follow: there could be no laughter where we do not compare ourselves with others or with some former state of ourselves; and whenever we feel sudden glory, we would laugh. But neither conclusion is true. First, there are many cases where we laugh without engaging in self-evaluation; here Hutcheson offers literary examples of witty phrases which amuse us without making us feel superior to anyone. What is funny in these cases is the writer's cleverness with words and not any inferiority in the writer or in anyone else. We often laugh at someone else's ingenuity in other areas too; indeed, we laugh even at animals when they do something that makes them seem smarter than they usually seem. The second conclusion above is also false, Hutcheson shows. "If we observe an object in pain while we are at ease, we are in greater danger of weeping than laughing; and yet here is occasion for Hobbes's sudden joy." When we meet a poor beggar on the street, for example, why do we not double over in laughter when we realize how much better off we are than the beggar? And why do healthy people not visit hospitals "to get an afternoon of laughter" from seeing all the sick people? The main error in the Superiority Theory, according to Hutcheson, is that its advocates "have never distinguished between the words 'laughter' and 'ridicule': this last is but one particular species of the former." (15-16)

Providing further nuance to the concept of the ridicule in the comic and following Hutcheson, James Beattie critiques both Aristotle and Hobbes, in *The Development of*

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was regularly denounced as a work of materialism and of atheism. Indeed attacking it was the favourite sport of many authors in the second half of the century. Of these works the most important were perhaps that of Edward Hyde, the Earl of Clarendon in his *Brief View and Survey of the Dangerous and Pernicious Errors to Church and State in Mr Hobbes' Book, entitled Leviathan* (1676) and Ralph Cudworth's *True Intellectual System of the Universe* (1678), but these were just two amongst a large number. Although his account was thus publicly subject to an enormous amount of criticism, its logical power was never seriously dented by his opponents. The major questions relating to his system which have been raised since relate mostly to the inadequacy of Hobbes's view of human nature, which is often seen as too self-regarding, and the problem as to how men would ever agree to form a contract if the state of nature was as Hobbes describes it, where trust seems to be at a minimum. There can be no doubt, however, that political philosophy was changed in a fundamental way by Hobbes's book and many of the criticisms of his system which have been offered are actually answered within Hobbes's own text. There have been many interpretations of his work but there have been few, if any, clear refutations of his analysis, and he remains with a reputation as high today as it has ever been" (http://www.thoemmes.com/encyclopedia/hobbes.htm). The encyclopaedia does not offer examples to support its claims of Hobbes's superior arguments, but it is important to note that despite criticisms against Hobbes, his ideas are still highly valuable contributions to the understanding of the comical.

Comic Theory, Haberland describes: Beattie "criticizes Aristotle's definition in the POETICS for being concerned with only the laughter of ridicule and not the laughable in general." (49). Beattie divides laughter into the ludicrous and the ridiculous, with the ludicrous exciting pure laughter and the ridiculous exciting laughter that is mixed with contempt (48). Critiquing Hobbes, Beattie wittily points out that if laughter arises from pride, then the upper classes, the wise, strong, and beautiful people of the world would laugh most of their lives, celebrating their superiority over the lesser masses of the world (49). Beattie's specifications are a worthy and necessary understanding the comic beyond its equation with ridicule. Counter to the dominant western tradition, amongst others of the period, Hutcheson and Beattie claim there is more to laughter than simply "laughing at."[100]

II. Letting the Frog Out of Your Throat: Laughter as Release

II. A. Laughter as Release in Carnival and Freud

A part of superiority theory points to the comical as a type of socially sanctioned release. Indirectly, this conception may have its roots in the Dionysian elements of ancient comic festivals. The festive and "subversive" strand of understanding comedy (and its cousins) has its roots in ancient Greece. "Subversive" is in quotes, because festivals of subversion are to a great degree, an integral part of a community, so they may not be as nihilistic as later theorists on the carnival, for instance, emphasize.[101] Plato warns against the destructive quality of comedy, which inspires emotions to run free from intellectual control. Although he takes a medicinal approach (which develops into Renaissance Humour theory), claiming that laughter is a healthy catharsis (serving reason instead of emotions), Aristotle agrees that comedy causes emotions to burst. Culturally, there is an assumed link between comedy and some sort of religious ritual, preceding the time of both Plato and Aristotle, when drama exists as secular literature, complete with state-sponsored writing contests and at least one handbook of advice by Aristotle. Even though, in *The Origins and Early Form of Greek Comedy*, George Else challenges the claim of drama's religious origin, claiming that drama originates in a literary and secular framework, drama is still typically taken to originate from religious ritual. The exact source of that origin is a mystery, evidenced by the difficult etymology of comedy.

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[100] Contrasting (to a certain degree) Sanders's critique of negative religious attitudes towards laughter in *Sudden Glory*, Beattie claims Christianity fosters polite laughter in the non-ridiculing sense. Beattie includes three factors that alter the way comedy functions in eighteenth century England, leading to a more refined sense of humour. According to Haberland in *The Development of Comic Theory*, those three factors are "the elevated status of women in polite society, the development of political institutions, and lastly, the ameliorating effect of Christianity" (51).

Erich Segal in *The Death of Comedy* provides at least three etymological possibilities. For Byzantine scholars, "Comedy was born at night. At least this is the fanciful conclusion of some long-ago scholars who derived "comedy" from *kōma* ("sleep") and *ōidē* ("song")" (1). However, "what they lacked in philological acumen, the Byzantine scholars seem to have made up in psychological intuition," because several such scholars "argued that *kōma* begot comedy because of the uninhibiting nature of the nocturnal mentality" (2). Along with the Byzantine theory, "Aristotle is among the many ancients who gave some credence to a Doric tradition which derived "comedy" from

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[101] "Subversive" also needs to be qualified because often subversion is institutionalized beyond a culture's festivals. For instance, certain schools of thought, academic theories critiquing dominant ideology, Marxist critiques of capitalism, Feminist critiques of patriarchy, and so on, are all an integral, exciting, and vibrant part of the University. It is no wonder then, that historically, during tyrannical regimes, certain thinkers from educational institutions have been forcefully directed towards less hospitable institutions – this of course assumes that universities can be hospitable.

kome, "country village" (3). For Segal, "*Kōmē* is related to comedy because the country has always stood vividly in the human imagination as a place of greater freedom" (3). For modern philologists, Segal says, "the true father of "comedy" can only be *kōmos*, the wild, wine-soaked, no-holds-barred revel which characterized most Aristophanic finales" (4). For Segal, all three origins are intertwined:

> Thus, psychically, all three etymologies are related and legitimate. Dreams, "country matters," and revels are all licensed indulgences of fantasy, releases from Civilization and its Discontents, with all's well that ends well. This alleged triple linkage offers its own valid dimension to the *idea* of Comedy. For it matters less who Comedy's true father was than what its true nature is. *Kōmos* is a rule-breaking revel in the flesh, Comedy an orgy in the mind. Perhaps with "holiday humour" we can entertain all three proposals and argue that Comedy, the mask that launched a thousand quips, is named as provocative an etymology as Helen of Troy: a dreamsong of revel in the country. (9)

Certainly, there is a link between the three lines that birth comedy. In recent scholarship, the comical and release have two major manifestations, one social and the other psychological, with Bakhtin and Freud, respectively, as their most famous advocates.

Socially, the most explicit, ritualistic, and carnivalesque of the links is the reference to Dionysus. As the German Romantics postulate, the difficulty with discovering origins is that the present often alters the way one sees the past. For instance, whether Bakhtin's carnival, or more properly, the revolutionary, subversive concept that is inspired by Bakhtin's writing on carnival, is easily applicable to ancient Greek rites is disputable, and quite likely, impossible to answer conclusively. Similarly, a freedom from the superego would be different in a society where personified deities cheat on one another. Regardless, what is assumed about the Dionysian festival highlights a pattern of resurrection, whereby a god dies and is reborn, prompting Frye's association of comedy with spring. The religious origins and this very notion of resurrection are two aspects that Barry Sanders (in *Sudden Glory*) undervalues in his survey of negative attitudes towards laughter. If, in the strict dramatic sense, comedy ends happily, reaches home, and resurrects a society, then comedy is not simply something to be feared by Plato or something that radically threatens the status quo. Rather, to emphasize the more conservative functioning of the comical as release, comedy may serve as a liminal ritual, helping a culture cope with change, while sustaining some continuity, transforming from one generation to the next.

Alongside the existence of the release ritual, for Bakhtin, the festival may be much more rebellious. Bakhtin's conception of the carnival of bringing the high low is, in theoretical terms, strongly associated with burlesque. In *Parody*, Rose says: Bakhtin "seems unaware of the similarity of his own concept of parody as ridicule" to parody as burlesque (144). Originally for Bakhtin, as Rose cites him, the folk humor of the carnival is regenerative: "Folk humor denies, but it revives and renews at the same time. Bare negation is completely alien to folk culture" (167). However, Foucault helps radicalize the carnivalesque, by merging Bakhtin with Nietzsche and Marx (189-190). According to *Comedy*, Stott believes, "The inversions and suspensions permitted and legitimized by carnival represent substantive challenges to authority, therefore offering the possibility that comedy, invested with the spirit of festive and carnival traditions, may also be an expression of popular discontent" (34). This competition between a dominant culture and a proletariat mass becomes highly useful for scholars questioning ruling ideologies. Regardless of its fluid critical currency, the carnival is not without its problems, with one being described by Stott in the following manner: "modern critical interest is guilty of retaining the elitist generic divisions that once denigrated comedy, keeping it as the working-class cousin of aristocratic tragedy and other 'serious' forms" (39).[102] By explaining a long history of bias against laughter, especially "low" humour, Sanders uses carnival subversion to lend greater respect to the first joke in English literature by Chaucer and to the artistry of Lenny Bruce in his *Sudden Glory*.[103] While the emphasis on the carnival as progressive political subversion, like earlier emphases on superiority, may lead to one-sided conceptions of the comic, such an approach, as evident to a certain degree in Sanders, may be necessary to correct the long-standing dismissal of certain types of comical works and the generally negative attitude towards laughter.

Freud's release theory parallels that of the carnival, modeled however, upon his notion of the individual's psychological components consisting of the id, ego, and superego. Spencer and Freud's theory is one that claims to be biological; hence, all humans have the same release function when it comes to expressing humour. In *Comedy*, Stott explains, "The mechanics of Freud's theory of laughter are not entirely his, but rather based in part on the work of Herbert Spencer (1820-1903), the father of evolutionary philosophy" (138). In turn, Spencer's theory had at least one predecessor in the anonymous *An Essay on Laughter* (1769), which describes "an internal battle between the mind and the muscles" (138). For Spencer, laughter is like "released steam pressure," redirecting internal nervous energy (138). Related to incongruity theory, when one expects something, but then there is "a lowering of anticipated ideas," then the surplus energy that builds (because of the anticipation for something else) is released. Freud modifies Spencer's biological musings into an interaction between id and superego. Stott explains Freud as follows[104]:

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[102] One problem with the carnival is being associated with bringing the high low. In a sense, if low subverts high, then the categories of high and low are sustained. The hierarchy is implicit in the supposed subversion.

[103] In his sixth chapter, Sanders explores how "The Miller's Tale" is the first joke narrative written in English. Theoretically inspired by Bakhtin, Sanders notes how the comic targets serve as a funnel for the anger of an older man marrying a younger woman, taking the younger woman off of the marriage market, away from a younger man. The younger man's frustration is expressed through the subversive humour of "The Miller's Tale." The interpretation Sanders provides is convincing; however, he overlooks the non-comic tradition of such a narrative. King Arthur, Lancelot, and Guinivere form a romantic triangle of a similar situation, in a non-comic manner. In this way, "The Miller's Tale" may also be a parody. As for Lenny Bruce, even though Sanders claims there is a lack of religious appreciation for laughter and the comic, Sanders himself borrows the notion of the misunderstood martyr and applies it to the tortured genius of Lenny Bruce and, to a lesser degree, Charles Chaplin.

> Freud's discussion of laughter occurs within the context of laughter as a response to jokes only, and two types of joke in particular that he identifies as 'innocent' and 'tendentious'. The innocent joke is essentially a pun or word game and appeals because of its technique and formal qualities, its play on words or transposition of concepts, as in Freud's example: 'Not only did he not believe in ghosts; he wasn't even frightened of them' (Freud, 2001: 92). As for the tendentious joke, says Freud, 'there are only two purposes that it may serve, and these two can themselves be subsumed under a single heading. It is either a *hostile* joke (serving the purpose of aggressiveness, satire, or defence), or an *obscene* joke (serving the purpose of exposure)' (Freud, 2001: 97). The need for these jokes is a response to social expectations, as the norms of etiquette usually prevent us from directly insulting others or broaching taboo subjects. (139)[105]

Leaving aside the fact that Freud avoids supporting the theory through scientific testing, there are still several weaknesses with Freud's explanation. One, in the tradition of downplaying the gentler, more playful aspect of comedy, Freud downplays what he terms the innocent joke in favour of the tendentious ones. Two, the tendentious ones are associated with the libidinal energies of violence and sexuality, hence the hostile joke and the obscene joke. So, Freud stresses the darker element of the comic, placing the theory within the tradition of joking as hostility and ridicule. Three, Freud's focus is jokes, which function differently in varied contexts. Namely, joking with friends is different from the artistic delivery of jokes or joke-like material. The cultural sphere (gender, ethnic, and religious), the specific environment (in private discussion or public interaction), the number of people involved (speaking to one person or to an entire audience), and so on, all affect the function of jokes. Fourth, the joke is seen as a means to alleviate the joker's inhibition while addressing a social taboo, so there is an conflict between one's deepest psychological self and one's learned social constraints. Such a schema may too neatly separate the psychological/biological from the social. That is, there is a mutually exclusive nature versus nurture distinction. Fifth, related to the fourth critique, the psychological and social divide overlooks the possibility that violent and sexual urges may be highly influenced by social attitudes towards the very identification of them. A specific society may have taboos on sex and violence, while another may not. One culture may encourage marriage between cousins, while another may not. Similarly, one culture may find it suitable to hunt and kill a dog for food, while another would find it abhorrent. In *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Attardo offers another critique of Freud, as offered by Todorov. Specifically critiquing Freud's joke techniques in the first chapter of *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious*, Attardo claims that Freud's distinction between referential and verbal humor directly corresponds to Cicero's distinction, but Freud does not mention such an influence, leading

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[104] Adding to Stott's identification of Freud's debt to Spencer, according to *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Attardo claims Freud is also indebted to Karl Groos, who was "An important proponent of the play theory" (49). Release theories and play theories of humor are related in the sense that either an individual or a group loosens normally restricted inhibitions.

[105] While Freud's theory highlights the anti-social element of joking, jokes also uphold taboos. Jokes require taboos, in Freud's theory, to be tendentious, and so, while they are anti-social, they do not destroy their maker, in a sense.

> Todorov to the conclusion that "the symbolic mechanism that Freud describes is not specific at all: the operations he identifies (in the case of the joke) are simply those of each linguistic symbols, as they have been classified, in

> particular by the rhetorical tradition" (Todorov 1977: 345). Todorov also notes that Benveniste reaches similar conclusions while analyzing the role of language in Freud's analysis: "the unconscious uses a proper 'rhetoric' which, such as style, has its own 'figures'" (Benveniste 1966: 86). In short, Freud's analysis is not so much specific to humor, bur rather serves as an analysis of the linguistic tools that express it which are not peculiar to humor (see also Todorov (1981)). (55)

Despite such weaknesses, Freud's ideas are still useful for their convenient psychological schema and because of their compatibility with several other theoretical paradigms. According to Attardo, literary theories often mix early psychology, especially Freud and Jung, with genre theory; Attardo even says that in literary studies, "The most quoted authors are Freud and Bergson" (51).[106] Certainly, as Bakhtin's carnival ties in well with discussions of ideological conflicts, Freud's concepts also complement interests in the more sexual and aggressive aspects of human power relations. Since the release approach may move individuals from communicative speech to playful language, from productive action to slapstick, or from proper social behaviour to crude interactions or silly demonstrations, release theory also overlaps with incongruity theory, which will be taken up in the next section of the broad theoretical survey. Before that, we need to play.

II. B. The Evolution of Play: Homo ridens, Homo ludens, and Homo De(Con)structionist

Aristotle's designation of humans as *homo ridens* can be taken to indicate that humans laugh at one another in triumph, or because they have pent-up energy that needs to be periodically released, or because play is a central component to human life. Indeed, a great deal of social interaction and social experience may involve some level of play, as Johann Huizinga advances in *Homo Ludens* and as George Aichele applies to the comic in *Comedy as Theology*. For Huizinga, play is central to civilized culture, although in *Comedy as Theology*, according to Aichele, Huizinga "denies the identity of play and the comic" (79). Unlike Huizinga, Aichele argues for a similarity between play and the comic. Both play and the comic are prior to humanity and religion (animals play), both are "this-worldly," "in playing, the human being 'plays the fool,' for the time being," and "Play has within it a tension between believing and not believing (making believe) which is the eternal comic tension between *eirôn* and *alazôn*" (80). Aichele says that Huizinga emphasizes "the culture-creating functions of play," which ties in with comedy's questioning of categories as natural and regenerative function (80). Related to and cited by Aichele, Jurgen Moltmann stresses the link between play and the comic, claiming many games are safety-valves that may "release potentially revolutionary energies and thus conserve the status quo" (80). In addition, there are games of freedom, which "rely heavily on the imagination and allow people to experiment with different perspectives for change" (80). In this way, "Such games allow humanity to play with the future" (80). In *Comedy as Theology*, Aichele says that for Moltmann in *Theology of Play*, some laughter liberates man from fear, because if freedom is the absence of fear, then laughter can be a revolutionary activity: "Play and freedom require iconoclasm, the ability to change one's conditions and oneself" (81). For such theorists, the comic can serve to improve humanity.

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[106] In addition, in *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Attardo claims that in literary analyses of the comical, "The works of Bakhtin (1984) and Huizinga (1939) are also very popular and often quoted (see Ferroni 1974). The psychological and Bakhtinian traditions may not be unconnected; see Byrd (1987) who argues for an influence of Freud on Bakhtin" (51).

For some poststructuralists, comic laughter marks something outside of language. In *Comedy*, Andrew Stott says poststructuralism "has configured laughter as a trope that expresses a sense of the beyond, of something outside language and cognition" (141). Explaining further, Stott says:

> Following a theme established in the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, what Simon Critchley has called 'the golden laughter of tragic affirmation' (Critchley, 2002: 105), poststructuralist laughter acts like a sonar, reaching out and signaling the limit of everything that can be said and understood. This laughter is not an expression of pleasure, superiority, or release; nor is it nonsense, the worthless opposite of intelligibility. Rather, laughter acts as a powerful recognition of the end of understanding in language and the comic recognition of the subject's failure to grasp it. (141)

According to Stott, the playful elements of comedy serve deconstruction's philosophic approach well. As Stott puts it, "laughter is a form of the Derridean concept of *differance*, a way of thinking of language as a structure of infinite referral and defferal, in which there are no fully meaningful terms, only traces of terms" (142). A recognition of both the creative and the non-absolute qualities of language and the comic may have a link with the Jena Romantics, who stress Socrates as a playful *eirôn*, testing categories and pointing out flaws in his opponent's arguments. For Helene Cixous, Stott explains, "The laugh of the Medusa is the revolutionary call of the woman outside patriarchal definitions; this laughter rejects phallocentric identification" (143). An earlier, but related conception has a more negative line of development beginning with Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer. For them, according to Stott, "Laughter is offered instead of satisfaction; it is a means of rendering all desires and ambitions beyond those provided by capitalism as ludicrous and stupid propositions" (145). For Adorno and Horkheimer, laughter is a pacifying mechanism that ultimately places the laugher in the role of the buffoon, making them have an association with Plato's condemnation of laughter as unbecoming for the educated elite. Adorno and Horkheimer are related to the poststructural view, because, as Stott explains, they all lend "laughter the air of an extra-linguistic recognition of inauthenticity" (145). In Lance Olsen's *Circus of the Mind in Motion*, postmodern joking is privileged for its "de(con)structive impulse: "absences may signal emptiness and the lack of meaning, but they also signal gaps that need to be filled and can be filled in an infinity of ways" (19).[107] Echoing the Jena Romantic emphasis on creative flux, Lance Olsen believes that "Postmodern humor delights in its own sense of liberty. It delights in its own sense of process. Indeed, process is everything, because the goal is at best uncertain, at worst nonexistent" (19). In *Comedy After Postmodernism*, Kirby Olson relies heavily on Deleuze and Lyotard, in order to claim that both postmodernism and comedy "are aligned in that they function by overturning master narratives and ridding metaphysics of transcendence and closure" (6). As is evident, certain theorists (such as Olsen and Olsen) merge the comic functions of playful questioning with poststructural and postmodern conceptions of language, identity, and the critique of absolutist thinking.

Most recently, play has been studied from an ethological perspective. In the 2004 *Philosophy and Literature* article, "Laughter and Literature: A Play Theory of Humor,"

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[107] Unlike the absurdist approach, which through Charles Baudelaire and Albert Camus stresses destruction and nihilism. The movement towards the postmodern conception of comic theory by Olson and Olsen may have flowed through "The Meanings of Comedy," for Sypher recognizes the ambivalent quality of the comic: "The ambivalence of comedy reappears in its social meanings, for comedy is both hatred and revel, rebellion and defense, attack and escape. It is revolutionary and conservative. Socially, it is both sympathy and persecution" (292).

Brian Boyd points out the number of evolutionary theories of humour, believing play theory to be the most convincing:

> There are a number of competing evolutionary theories of humor and/or laughter. One is in terms of aggression or mockery, like chimpanzees that hoot together at a common enemy. This is close to Hobbes and the superiority theory of humor, but neither for chimpanzees nor for children does laughter in fact begin in intimidating derogation. Another evolutionary explanation is in terms of disarming aggression, as a signal of submission, but as Robert Storey notes, one chimpanzee will never try to disarm another lurching ominously closer by greeting it with laughter. A third explanation is in terms of expressing relief at the passing of danger, or alerting others to the passing of a threat, but there is no evident selective advantage for such a signal. A fourth explanation, far more promising, explains laughter in terms of play. It has been most fully developed by the Dutch primatologist Jan van Hooff, but the psychologist Robert Provine, the evolutionary psycholinguist Steven Pinker, and the neuroscientist Terrence Deacon are also fundamentally in accord. (5-6)

Boyd points out that play is difficult to define, but play is a mammalian trait:

> Play has been observed in many animal species, including all mammals in which it has been looked for, and especially in rats, canines (dogs and wolves), primates and cetaceans (dolphins and whales). Easily recognized by experts and non-experts alike, despite the difficulty of defining it, play has been much studied by biologists. It seems clear that it must have an adaptive function, since it is so widespread within and across species, since it consumes valuable energy, since it puts players at increased risk of predation or injury, yet remains eagerly anticipated, solicited and maintained. Pleasure is nature's way of ensuring that creatures perform an activity, and animals and humans not only look as though they enjoy play but their brains release dopamine when they anticipate or take part in it. (6-7)

Indeed, play and joy may be an integral part of the human experience.[108] Building on research in neuroscience, genetics, and animal behaviour, in the 2006 *Humor* article, "Humor Appreciation as an Adaptive Esthetic Emotion," Glenn E. Weisfeld finds a parallel between the arts and humor, in that both are products of the evolutionary process, "cultivated in order to provide valuable experience to the receiver" (2). Related to Bergson, and because humour may provide educational insight, Weisfeld believes humour is an entertaining way to learn:

> all forms of humor provide the recipient with edifying experience or information that enhances future fitness. For example, tickling (reported in great apes) and roughhousing (in Old World primates) provide opportunities to practice self-defense, escape and attack. Observing a clown take a pratfall helps us to avoid a similar misstep ourselves. Similarly, many jokes inform us about delicate or "ticklish," social situations and hence warn us against committing similar social gaffes. (5-6)

Learning is a key element of the play approach, which provides it some overlap with the superiority tradition, although the play approach allows for learning to happen "even if there is no victim" (6). For Weisfeld, appreciating humour, as opposed to the Platonic tradition, is an indicator of higher cognitive function and higher general intelligence.[109] Importantly, Weisfeld points out that humour appreciation is not limited to humans, so the notion that humour is evidence of human superiority over other animals is misleading.[110]

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[108] Of direct relevance for the next chapter, "The Western Mythos of Success," perhaps, one motivation for jobs that provide greater pay and benefits is that they allow for greater security and leisure time. In addition, people may pursue careers because they enjoy the work in some fundamental way.

[109] Weisfeld explains: "Some studies indicate that appreciation of both verbal and nonverbal humor depends on the integrity of the right frontal lobe (Shammi and Stuss 1999; Wild et al. 2003). The right hemisphere registers static arrays of features, such as spatial representations. If incongruity characterizes many examples of humor, the right hemisphere might perceive some of these mismatches, perhaps along with the hippocampus. Mental rotation ability, being able to imagine the shape of objects rotated in space, has been correlated with ratings jokes as funnier (Johnson 1990). However, evidence of this sort, in which two aptitudes are found to be correlated is generally unconvincing as indicative of a specific causal link. Both aptitudes might instead be caused by a third factor, such as general intelligence" (17). In the 2005 *International Education Journal* article, "Humour in Cognitive and Social Development," Paul Jewett argues that among other skills, gifted children demonstrate an acute sense of humour.

III. The Celebrated Jumping Frog: Laughter as Incongruity

III. A. Incongruity: Surprising Roots and Development

Laughter stemming from incongruity also has its origins in ancient Greece, with both Plato and Aristotle identifying such a functional element. In *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Attardo points out that for some, "Aristotle's definition of humor as 'something bad' was interpreted as meaning something unbefitting, out of place, thus not necessarily 'evil,' which illustrates that the comic can be and was interpreted in different ways, despite an emphasis on hostility or superiority theory" (48). In Book three, Chapter eleven of his *Rhetoric*, while speaking of the use of metaphor to inject liveliness into one's speech, Aristotle touches upon the playfulness of surprise. Aristotle declares: "Liveliness is specially conveyed by metaphor, and by the further power of surprising the hearer; because the hearer expected something different, his acquisition of the new idea impresses him all the more" (http://www.public.iastate.edu/~honeyl/Rhetoric/rhet3-11.html). Aristotle moves from metaphors to riddles, claiming that "Well-constructed riddle are attractive for the same reason; a new idea is conveyed, and there is metaphorical expression" (http://www.public.iastate.edu/~honeyl/Rhetoric/rhet3-11.html). Finally, Aristotle moves into joking, explaining the surprise twist in the following manner:

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[110] Weisfeld declares: "The human genome project is improving public awareness of the common origins of all animal life. The close genetic relationship between humans and chimpanzees (98.4% of genes in common) is underscored by reports of local cultural traditions in the latter (McGrew 1992) . . . These facts should make us wary of explanations that posit humor arose de novo in humans. The great apes are capable of appreciating humor, at least under conditions of domestication, and exhibit a vocalization homologous to human laughter (Darwin 1998). Gamble (2001) offered convincing evidence of subtle humor in signing chimpanzees and gorillas. She made the nice point that great apes in the wild might have the potential for generating wit much as their domesticated conspecifics can, but their environmental circumstances, such as frequent danger, may preclude this. If we recognize that humans too are domesticated and lead rather safe lives, we can perhaps better appreciated our kinship with these somber wild simians. Our hominid ancestors may have been a pretty humorless lot too" (20).

> The word which comes is not what the hearer imagined: thus, "Onward he came, and his feet were shod with his -- chilblains," where one imagined the word would be "sandals." But the point should be clear the moment the words are uttered. Jokes made by altering the letters of a word consist in meaning, not just what you say, but something that gives a twist to the word used . . . (http://www.public.iastate.edu/~honeyl/Rhetoric/rhet3-11.html)

Aristotle emphasizes factual knowledge to understand the surprise twists of jokes; such knowledge also applies to understanding metaphors, riddles, and similes. Moving beyond literal meaning, to understand double-meanings, wordplay, and so on, requires a knowledge of language and references the joke may be making, as well as a playful appreciation for the poetic and mutable quality of words, where meanings can be superimposed upon one another.[111] Aristotle's understanding of the poetic and rhetorical skill of joking is evident in his advice for quality jokes to offer quick and lively twists.[112]

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[111] From Book three, Chapter eleven of his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle illustrates: "to the Athenians their empire (*arche*) of the sea was not the beginning (*arche*) of their troubles, since they gained by it. Or the opposite one of Isocrates, that their empire (*arche*) was the beginning (*arche*) of their troubles. Either way, the speaker says something unexpected, the soundness of which is thereupon recognized. There would be nothing clever is saying "empire is empire." Isocrates means more than that, and uses the word with a new meaning. So too with the former saying, which denies that *arche,* in one sense was *arche* in another sense. In all these jokes, whether a word is used in a second sense or metaphorically, the joke is good if it fits the facts" (http://www.public.iastate.edu/~honeyl/Rhetoric/rhet3-11.html).

[112] Also from Book three, Chapter eleven of his *Rhetoric*, Aristotle explains: "The type of language employed-is the same in all these examples; but the more briefly and antithetically such sayings can be expressed, the more taking they are, for antithesis impresses the new idea more firmly and brevity more quickly. They should always have either some personal application or some merit of expression, if they are to be true without being commonplace -- two requirements not always satisfied simultaneously. Thus "a man should die having done no wrong" is true but dull: "the right man should marry the right woman" is also true but dull. No, there must be both good qualities together, as in "it is fitting to die when you are not

As is clear by the associations between metaphors, riddles, and jokes, Aristotle touches upon the artistic value of joking, acknowledging such figurative devices as not simply means to be mean, but as techniques related to the playful and imaginative quality of other literary devices.[113]

After the critiques of seventeenth and eighteenth century critiques of superiority theory, Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer further develop incongruity theory during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century. Explaining the development, in *Comedy*, Stott writes:

> While Beattie was not the first to use the words 'incongruous' or 'incongruity' in relation to humour (that honour belongs to Mark Akenside's *Pleasures of Imagination* (1744), his definition of laughter's trigger is entirely representative of the shift in dominance from superiority to incongruity theories in the eighteenth century, and is the key to humour upheld by philosophers such as Kant and Schopenhauer. (136)

Adding to Stott's explanation, according to Haberland in *The Development of Comic Theory*, Vinventius Madius in his mid-sixteenth century *De Ridiculis* "was the first to state explicitly that wonder is a necessary ingredient of the risible" (30). In *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Attardo similarly claims that Madius's "most interesting insight into humor" was "his emphasis on *admiratio*, i.e., surprise" (38). In his *Critique of Judgment*, Kant defines laughter in the manner of a thwarted expectation that becomes associated with incongruity theory. Unlike Kant, Attardo says "Schopenhauer's definition of

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fit for death." The more a saying has these qualities, the livelier it appears: if, for instance, its wording is metaphorical, metaphorical in the right way, antithetical, and balanced, and at the same time it gives an idea of activity" (http://www.public.iastate.edu/~honeyl/Rhetoric/rhet3-11.html).

[113] According to Haberland in *The Development of Comic Theory*, the legendary *Tractatus Coislinianus*, "which has the appearance of lecture notes, was written, it is believed, sometime between the fourth and second centuries B.C.," provides a list of comic techniques (26).

laughter mentions "incongruity" explicitly" (48). Like Kant, it can be said that Schopenhauer explains that laughter derives from a sudden insight of defeated expectations, as opposed to a sudden glory over someone.

Incongruity theory, like the other theories, can and has been critiqued for its claim of discovering the mystery of humour. According to the *British Journal of Aesthetics*, in "Humour, Laughter, and the Structure of Thought," Michael Clark says, "there are many incongruities which do not amuse us" and "even when the incongruous is humorous the incongruity is rarely the only, or even the principle source of humour" (238). Moreover, we can enjoy something that is not funny. Or, human laughter may express joy, embarrassment or hysteria as well as amusement" (240). The aesthetic amusement of the incongruous extends beyond that of laughter, for incongruity can be non-humorous, such as the playing of "non-sad" music: "a bereaved widow might well choose music of "an incongruous beauty" to be played at her husband's funeral, and her aesthetic enjoyment of it might be at one with her grief" (242). While incongruity helps explain the structure of many comical moments, incongruity alone (or for that matter, superiority or release) does not inspire the risible.

Similarly, it would be a mistake to believe that incongruity causes the collapse of the cognitive faculties. Playful knowing is involved with jokes that fool expectation. The surprise twist may make sense of the incongruous, hence, the development of Incongruity-Resolution theory by Thomas Shultz, for whom the incongruity is a two-stage process. As referenced by Amy Carrell, Shultz identifies incongruity as a conflict between expectation and occurrence, while resolution is the next. After Shultz, according to Amy Carrell, Mary K. Rothbart and Diana Pien combine two categories of incongruity and two categories of resolution. Referring to Rothbart and Pien, Carrell says, "What can happen, they claim, are impossible or possible incongruity and complete or incomplete resolution" (http://www.uni-duesseldorf.de/WWW/MathNat/Ruch/PSY356-Webarticles/Historical_Views.pdf). In its strictest sense, incongruity theory works especially well with identifying the structure of joke texts and, to a lesser degree, visual gags.

III. B. Bisociation, Isotopy-Disjunction, and Jokemes

There is the possibility of deeper philosophical significance, especially as Koestler describes the phenomenon. Earlier than Shultz and Rothbart and Pien, in *Act of Creation*, Arthur Koestler claims comedy results when an idea or event is understood as simultaneously belonging to two different meanings: "the perceiving of a situation or an idea, L, in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference, M1 and M2. The event, L, in which the two intersect, is made to vibrate simultaneously on two different wavelengths, as it were. While this unusual situation lasts, L is not merely linked to one associative context, but bisociated with two" (35).[114] An alternative to emphasizing a resolution that reasserts coherent meaning, Koestler plays up the paradoxical moment in joking, that site of contradiction which opens up the socially dependent quality of both sense and nonsense.[115] The power of comedy stems from appreciating two contexts at once, so one can see oneself as capable of being fooled, in a sense. In this way, comedy asks the rational subject to be less confident in his or her sense of knowing and agency, in favour of the more humble position of the fooled. Existence may be more uncertain than knowledge and authority lead us to believe.

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[114] Exhibiting some overlap with Freud and Bergson, Koestler's bisociation is evident in dreams, sudden insights, and puns, with the effect of providing an escape from habitual behaviour.

[115] A parallel stress occurs in the study of irony. That is, an ironic work may be indirect, but its underlying meaning is understood, so coherent meaning is effectively communicated. Or, if one stresses the moment of uncertainty, then the meaning may not be as coherent as stable irony hopes for.

Algirdas Julien Greimas advanced the isotopy-disjunction model (IDM) of humour. An isotopy is a semantic textual interpretation, which identifies the basic components of understanding a joke. In *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Salvatore Attardo explains Greimas's approach in the following manner: "Greimas' analysis thus consists of two separate claims: 1) jokes are composed of two "parts"; and 2) jokes contain an "opposition" or a "variation" of an isotopy, and at the same time a "camouflage" of the opposition, performed by the connecting term" (63).[116] According to Attardo's explanation, Greimas's theory is only limited to a handful of pages, but his work and terminology becomes especially influential for European structuralist linguists. Attardo identifies Greimas's influence on humour analysis by briefly surveying the subsequent work of Morin, Charaudeau, Niculescu, Hausmann, Guiraud, and Manetti; in addition, Greimas points out that the IDM and Greimassian semantics becomes especially influential for German linguistics, where it merges with folklore studies (82-84).

In *An Anatomy of Humor* and *The Art of Comedy Writing*, Arthur Asa Berger introduces the notion of jokemes, modifying the language of Propp and Greimas, amongst others. From *Elementa*, Berger explains a joke in the following way:

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[116] In *Linguistic Theories of Humor*, Attardo says "Greimas's goal in *Sémantique structurale* is to formulate a deductive foundation of semantics on a Hjelmslevian basis. Hjelmslev's (1943 [1953]) formalization of the Saussurean idea of *valeur*, i.e., a purely relational characterization of meaning, is the model for Greimas' analysis. Greimas' exposition begins from the discovery procedure of the smallest units of meaning (*sémes*) and builds up to larger units" (64). Since phonological differences "do not match semantic differences," Greimas "concluded that the semantic level must be analyzed autonomously, albeit with the same methodology (i.e., the principle of commutation)" (65). As for the units of meaning, Greimas borrows the terms séme, lexéme, and classéme from Pottier, a forerunner in componential semantic analysis, which Attardo explains in order to establish the importance of Greimas's concept of isotopy and disjunction .

> A joke is conventionally defined as a short narrative text, meant to amuse, with a punch line. This punch line is a "surprise" and is what generates the humor. This surprise takes the first part of the joke and "opposes" it, we might say, by adding an unexpected element. The structure of a typical joke is shown below.
>
> A >B >C >D >E >F >G*
> to
> H
>
> Figure 2: the narrative structure of a joke
>
> A to G* represents the narrative, with each letter being a "jokeme" or basic unit of the joke and with G* being the jokeme that serves as the punch line. This punch lines generates some kind of meaning, H, which elicits laughter (when the joke is a good one). We move from a linear narrative or syntagmatic structure with G* and H to a paradigmatic structure in which there is meaning that is unexpected and a set of simple binary oppositions that can be elicited from the text.
> (online.sfsu.edu/~aberger/ELEMENTA.doc)

Building on his concept of jokemes, in *An Anatomy of Humor* and *The Art of Comedy Writing*, Berger advances four basic categories of humour techniques (identity, language, logic, and action), under which he lists and describes forty-five specific techniques, creating a taxonomy that he hopes will be useful for the analysis of humor. As with Koestler and Greimas, Berger stresses the surprise twist, providing specific terminology to describe the phenomenon. Incongruous shift theory develops even further with the recent linguistic theory of Victor Raskin.

III. C. Script-Based Semantic Theory

Connected to incongruity theory for the dynamic of the trigger shift in meaning, Victor Raskin's script-based semantic theory, as developed in *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*, provides a more thorough linguistic model for related ruminations by Koestler, Greimas, and Berger. In a strict technical sense, Raskin's work is not simply a theory of incongruity, but since there is a similar emphasis on a joke text's sudden shift in meaning, as opposed to the hostile quality of joking or the relief jokes may provide, Raskin's work continues in the broader tradition of incongruity. Both superiority/disparagement/hostility theorists and relief/release theorists have acknowledged the existence of an incongruous shift. With its stress on technique, then, incongruity theory works well with the other two theories and serves as an appropriate precursor to the more recent Chomskian cognitive-linguistics of Raskin's Artificial Intelligence inspired script-based semantic theory.

Following Chomsky's notion of deep structures, Raskin believes that language users refer to their transformational grammar in order to experience the shifts of what he terms joke scripts.[117] McArthur's *The Oxford Companion to the English Language* explains a deep structure to be "deep or underlying forms that by transformation become surface or observable sentences of a particular language. In this theory, a passive was no longer to be derived from an active sentence, but both from a common deep structure, which was neither active nor passive" (215). While surface structures may be different, their deep structure is the same; that is, both the active and the passive variation of a sentence refer to a deep structure that encompasses both meanings. Because of Chomsky's concept of deep structure, the study of humour construction is given a boost, for jokes play upon the potential for meaning, the ambiguity inherent in any deep structure.

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[117] Noam Chomsky believes humans have an innate skill known as transformational grammar. According to Tom McArthur's *The Oxford Companion to the English Language*, Chomsky's "definition of *grammar* differs from both traditional and structuralist theories, in that he is concerned not only with a formal descriptive system but also with the linguistic structures and processes at work in the mind. He sees such structures as universal and arising from a genetic predisposition to language. Features drawn from mathematics include *transformation* and *generation.* As proposed in 1957, *transformational rules* were a means by which one kind of sentence (such as the passive *The work was done by local men*) could be derived from another kind (such as the active *Local men did the work*). Any process governed by such rules was a *transformation* (in the preceding case the *passivization transformation*) and any sentence resulting from such rules was a *transform*" (214-215).

Raskin focuses upon identifying the properties that distinguish a joke text from a non-joke text.[118] In the 2005 *Poetics Today* article "Funny Fiction," Cristina Larkin Galiñanes says "Raskin offers a linguistically based theory centered on the notion of ''scripts.'' This construct, incorporated into linguistics from the field of Artificial Intelligence by Charles Fillmore (1975, 1985) and Wallace Chafe (1977)" (81). Raskin speaks of jokes as offering two opposing scripts that overlap at a point where the joke can pivot, because of the confusion inherent in the overlap. In his 1985 *Psychology Today* article "Jokes," Raskin says that during the 1970s, linguistic semantics could finally account for contextual and situation information, through the concept of presupposition, entailment, and implicature, leading to what he calls the first semantic theory of humor (http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1175/is_v19/ai_3957552). Being a combinatorial theory, or one that "calculates the meaning of each sentence on the basis of the meanings of the individual words and of the ways they are combined," compared to previous theories, the semantic approach provides a lexicon that "contains entries that explicitly relate the word in question to a large number of related words; typical actions; time and place characteristics; and other possible attributes. These extended entries are called 'scripts'" (http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1175/is_v19/ai_3957552). Since every word in a sentence evokes a semantic script that refers to a wide range of meaning, there is the possibility of falling into a more ambiguous meaning than may be intended, leading to the central "hypothesis of the semantic theory of humor: The text is a joke if it is compatible, fully or in part, with two distinct scripts, and the two scripts are opposite in certain definite ways, such as good/bad, sex/no sex, or real/unreal" (http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1175/is_v19/ai_3957552). Raskin adds: "Most jokes contain a third element, a trigger or punch line, which switches the listener or reader from one script to another, creating the joke" (http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1175/is_v19/ai_3957552). Finally, Raskin qualifies the hypothesis with reference to the trigger, saying, "This element usually depends, especially in simple jokes, on ambiguity or contradiction" (http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1175/is_v19/ai_3957552). Raskin's theory updates inquiries into the incongruous shift that typifies many comic texts, and, as with incongruity theory in general, Raskin's approach is applicable to differing theoretical stresses, whether that of incongruity, release, or superiority, but also more explicitly scientific theories.[119]

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[118] In his famous *Psychology Today* article, Raskin offers the following closing words, define his use of linguistics, saying, "this is exactly what linguistics is all about: providing a formal, well-defined theory to match human intuition" (http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1175/is_v19/ai_3957552).

Conclusion to a Survey of Critical Discussions

Summarizing this survey of the key elements, debates, and discussions in comic theory, at least two repeated problems emerge: exclusiveness and necessary focus. For instance, in terms of exclusiveness, a weakness in understanding the development of superiority theory and incongruity theory is to place them in opposition to one another, when neither superiority, nor incongruity can explain all instances of the laughable. While not every instance of superiority generates laughter, neither is every incongruous moment the key to evoking laughter. At times, especially in more recent works, (such as Susan Purdie's *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse*), or in criticisms of the major thinkers, (such as Michael Clark's critique of Mike W. Martin in "Humour, Laughter, and the Structure of Thought"), elements of superiority, incongruity, and release have flirted with one another. Even Aristotle mentions laughter as both ridicule and contrast, emphasizing the ridiculing of low characters in his *Poetics*, but acknowledging the artistry of creating incongruity in his *Rhetoric*. Of the three major approaches, incongruity seems to be the most versatile partner theory, or the least exclusive, working with both superiority and release approaches to the comic.

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[119] Humor research includes specifically psychological inquiries, that Amy Carrell briefly charts, identifying the work of Mark Winkel (charts physiological reactions during the humour response, Lambert Deckers (Weight-judging paradigm or WJP to assess degrees of incongruity), Peter Derks and Sanjay Arora (cartoon sequencing), Ofra Nevo (relation between pain tolerance and humour, and Rod A. Martin (coping with stress and humour) (http://www.uni-duesseldorf.de/WWW/MathNat/Ruch/PSY356-Webarticles/Historical_Views.pdf). In the tradition of Norman Cousins, William F. Fry is another prominent figure emphasizing the positive health benefits of humour.

Despite a potential solution in deliberately mixing, merging, and overlapping of the various approaches to comic theory, any one particular work requires a necessary focus that opens it up to further criticism. Because of the wealth of factors involved in joking and humour, scholars require a necessary focus, which will inevitably exclude or downplay one element or another within the text or texts under examination.[120] Differing conceptions of the comic offer viewpoints that may at times be at odds with one another, but they are not automatically cancelling one another out to arrive at the perfect and all-encompassing anatomical chart of E.B. White's tailless and slimy creature. Although its name claims otherwise, superiority theory is not somehow always better or more appropriate than release theories, or incongruity theories. There is still something mysterious about the comic. The claims of the differing manifestations of superiority, release, and incongruity approaches may be undervaluing the slippery nature of the frog. Even if the varying theories overlap in their analysis, because of the overdetermined quality of funniness, there may still be, and probably should be, something missing.

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[120] In *Comedy*, Purdie attempts to reconcile the "problems inherent in joking's inseparable, simultaneous generation of both pleasure and power" (3). Her necessary focus limits her work to the intersection of gender identity and aggressive patriarchal language use through the theoretical influence of Saussure, Levi-Strauss, and Lacan. In other words, even though she acknowledges both power (superiority) and play (release), her work also becomes exclusive, but necessarily so, by leaving out alternative notions of, approaches to, or manifestations of the comic. As a result, the works she examines can be explored in alternative ways.

Is E.B. White correct to say that something dies in the process of examining the comical? In one sense, he is. Any one of the theories, perhaps as most theories do, tend to reduce the complexity of the object under examination, making the versatile beast sit still, when it is more comfortable jumping around. In a way, E.B. White seems to be saying that analysis takes away the bounce out of the comical. So, the dissection does, then, kill something in the process. In another way, however, E.B. White is incorrect. Rather than being killed, it seems more often than not, the elusive amphibian simply escapes the theorist's grasp. If past examinations are any predictor, then devising and applying comic theory in a sustained analysis promises to be an endeavour fraught with some uncertainty. Indeed, uncertainty may be a component of comic theory that has been undervalued. Relegating the comical to one major quality or another underestimates the intricacy of the lowly creature from the green world. Through briefly surveying over two millennia of comic theory, this chapter, quelling E.B. White's fear, believes the slippery frog continually eludes the scalpel's blade. Fortunately then, despite efforts such as this, the frog will jump another day.

Chapter III: Research Area of Interest

Selecting an appropriate topic is seldom a simple matter.
Joseph Gibaldi, *MLA Handbook for Writers*, 7

Introduction to Research Area of Interest

There is not one glaring weakness in comic theory that needs amendment, one major question that demands an answer, or one specific approach that will settle all previous disputes. Rather, there are several areas leading to further engaging discussion and study. The selection of one guiding area of interest (comic nescience), the selection of a primary corpus of examples (Anglo-American comical texts), and the selection of interesting areas (the popular American notion of success and the superiority approach to humour) to interrogate is somewhat of an artificial and biased enterprise. Focusing upon a particular topic is not simply an automatic outgrowth of a historical survey; rather, the area of interest also stems from how a student of comic theory perceives the field, makes connections between differing, perhaps disparate concepts, and needs to demonstrate competence while also exploring ideas and texts that are academically relevant and stimulating. It would be dishonest to claim that there is no personal bias involved in the selection of an area of interest; indeed, that is a key element in any sort of selection based upon interest. A further difficulty is deciding upon only one or a limited range of interesting areas, while respecting and speaking to critiques or avenues presented by one's superiors. A professional and personal interest, an attempt to fulfill institutional requirements, and an acknowledgment of paths opened by committee members, while sustaining a flexible sincerity to the way the research and writing itself will develop, are four elements contributing to this project's focal points.

I. Research Question

The introduction already offered a guiding research question, but it warrants repeating here. How and why do humorous texts utilize ambiguity, uncertainty, and multiplicity in those works that comically interrogate the success and esteem of heroic and scholarly manifestations of confident cognizant agency and does such an investigation and the overall articulation of comic nescience add to humour theory? This sub-section will break down this guiding question into its key parts.

I. A. How and Why

By offering differing and contradictory readings, the dissertation will demonstrate how humorous texts may lead to multiple interpretations. In particular, several interpretations will interrogate the confident cognizant agency of the heroic and academic persona. Such examinations will allow for some reflection upon why multiple readings are valuable for understanding comical texts and why an interrogation of confident cognizant agency is valuable for understanding success, prestige, prowess, and intelligence, especially within the Anglo-American English-language tradition and through the popular conception of the Alger success story.

I. B. Humorous Texts

Although humour, comical, laughter, funny, and other such terms have varied meanings, this dissertation primarily uses humour in its general sense, as synonymous with comical, funny, and amusing. When a more specific meaning of humour or comical is implied, then, the more specific meaning will be made clear either through a definition stating such, or through the use of an adjective or adjectival phrase. For instance, there is comedy in the multi-lateral sense of the term and there is comedy in the traditional sense, referring to a drama ending happily. There is humour in the general sense of amusing, but also a sense of humour, and bodily humours. To illustrate further, for instance, for Charles Gruner, humour has two functions, one as wit (a persuasive, rational tool) and the other as creative and artistic (emotional clowning). For Dahlberg, a humorist laughs with you, but a wit laughs at you.[121]

"Text" in this dissertations is also used in the general sense, to refer to literary texts, films, Internet films, television programs and episodes, radio programs and episodes, stand up comedy albums, monologues, performances, bits, and so on. Once again, when necessary, the dissertation makes specific clarifications. Along with the multi-disciplinary use of the term text, as mentioned in the introduction, the study is sensitive to the way a single text may be understood in differing ways, and thus itself be a multiple entity as opposed to one clear and consistent referent for all interpreters.

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[121] These references to Gruner and Dahlberg are through John C. Meyer's "Humor as a Double-Edged Sword," on page 324.

I. C. Ambiguity, Uncertainty, and Multiplicity

Ambiguity, uncertainty, and multiplicity may be used interchangeably under the general concept of comic nescience, but more specifically, each term implies differing emphases. This study borrows from *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, where Empson says ambiguity "gives room for alternative reactions to the same piece" (1). More than differing reactions, this dissertation believes comic texts benefit from creating an ambiguity in terms of both content and form.[122] In terms of understanding ambiguous content, audiences may laugh for reasons explainable by any one of the major theoretical schools. In terms of understanding ambiguous form, critics may be motivated to debate the most appropriate category (comedy, parody, satire, and so on) for an amusing text.

Uncertainty refers to the state of disorientation generated by a joke's surprise twist and uncertainty is opposed to confident cognizant agency. If a listener is oriented when he or she experiences a joke's set up, then a listener is disoriented by a joke's climactic twist, becoming re-oriented after the listener realizes his or her expectation was wrong and thus the listener re-understands the entire discourse through the new interpretation afforded by the punch line. Uncertainty also refers to a state of disorientation, in opposition to the orientation and control of the capable individual. Furthermore, uncertainty may refer to how simple the success sheme (the assumption that success and failure have a clear and identifiable causal agent) is, disregarding several other factors influencing success and failure.

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[122] Ambiguity may also exist in a third element, delivery. For stand up comedians, two possibilities are immediately evident. One, humorous texts are delivered in a manner to maximize ambiguous meaning or to confuse audiences. For instance, a joke may reach its surprise twist, only to be topped off by another twist or series of other punch lines or, specifically, toppers. Two, the same material is delivered in a different manner before a different (or same) audience, so that, after for instance, three performances, the same material can be understood in a few different ways.

Multiplicity refers to the manifold layers that a text may deliberately or involuntarily supply to its audience. Hence, a text may afford multiple readings, because of its ambiguous design and its corresponding ability to place audiences into variable interpretive positions. Alternatively, because of differing interpretive slants, a single text may lead to differing, even contradictory readings, regardless of whether the artist intends multiple interpretations. Whether intentional or unintentional, multiple readings are important for comic nescience, which claims one theory cannot easily explain some comical texts and one comical category may not suitably identify some comical works. For comic nescience, an applicability to differing theories and categories characterize some comical texts.[123]

The terms ambiguity, uncertainty, and multiplicity identify a dynamic space in comical communication, between artist, text, and audience, which pivots upon varying tensions, such as knowing/unknowing, intelligence/emotion, laughing at/laughing with, and so on.

I. D. Comically Interrogate

This dissertation agrees with John C. Meyer in "Humor as a Double-Edged Sword," who says humour has multiple functions. Meyer classifies humour into two opposing functions: unification (through identification and clarification) and division (through enforcement and differentiation).[124] On the one hand, humour may unify through identification, by enhancing the speaker's credibility or building group cohesiveness (318). Humour may also unify through clarification, aiding audience memory and understanding (319). On the other hand, humour may divide through enforcement, allowing "a communicator to enforce norms delicately by levelling criticism while maintaining some degree of identification with an audience" (320). In addition, humour may divide through differentiation, "to make both alliances and distinctions" (321). As is apparent, the unifying function of humour, including building group cohesiveness, is a basic definitional element of those theorists of comedy, such as Frye, who sees comedy as a social ritual for bettering society. Researchers interested in the health and educational benefits of humour will agree with what Meyer says about how humour: if used in a playful and thus unifying manner, humour can aid the health and well being of an audience or classroom. Bergson may agree with Meyer's claim that humour is a force of social correction, utilizing a jury of peer pressure to uphold normative values. Rhetoricians such as Cicero and later theorists who believe in the greater intelligence or class of wit may be sympathetic to Meyer's final category of division through differentiation.

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[123] However, comic nescience does not rule out that certain comic texts or comic moments within texts may be best explained by one theory or may be best relegated to one category.

[124] By unify and divide, Meyer refers to the relationship between the speaker and the social sphere.

As mentioned in the introduction, while Meyer's stress is on the agency of the speaker, comic nescience admits that humour is a double-edged sword not only because it can cut in opposing ways, unifying or dividing, but also because it may do so unwillingly. More to the focus of this subsection however, in this dissertation, "comically interrogate," identifies those comical texts that question heroic and intellectual prowess. Such questioning may either reinforce confident cognizant agency or subvert confident cognizant agency, or, do both at once. For comic nescience, doing both at once, allows different audience members, with differing values and tastes, to be amused in different ways and to take the text in differing ways (for instance, as a lesson, as a cathartic release, or as a momentary escape into art).

I. E. Confident Cognizant Agency

Confident cognizant agency refers to the demonstration and sense of secure knowing one may exhibit while successfully taking action or making quality interpretations. In this study, confident cognizant agency is associated with heroic prowess and intellectual ability. In terms of prowess, the hero overcomes obstacles and solves problems. In terms of intellect, the academic makes logically sound interpretations, categorizes phenomena, and makes sense of his or her subject in an organized fashion. Both are figures able to orient themselves in high-pressure situations (for heroes) or when facing complex ideas (for intellectuals).

As figures of respect or as comical characters, the hero and the academic parallel is not as unusual a pairing as it may initially appear, especially if one locates a connection with the stock characters of the soldier and the doctor. Culturally, military heroes hold high regard, as do doctors and scholars. In terms of comedy, the military braggart and the proud doctor figure date as far back as ancient Greece. In his *In Praise of Comedy*, Feibleman refers to Cornford, who says the “Swaggering Soldier and Learned Doctor” are “pretenders to superior courage and more than mortal wisdom” (28). The prestige of the soldier and doctor serves as appropriate comic targets for a society concerned with the persona of power that accompanies the uniform.

Heroes and academics are a regular part of contemporary North American culture, and they represent capability, success, and prowess. Differing from ancient Greece or

Rome, today, tales of heroes are rather commonplace and accessible to millions. Aeneas for Rome is a founding-father figure. America has George Washington and Lincoln as heroes, but the public also has John Wayne, Clint Eastwood, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and other icons of American manliness.[125] Add to that the regular portrayal of human-interest hero stories on television news programs, then hero narratives may be more abundant today than they were in the past. In terms of academia, in ancient times, education was not as openly accessible as it is today. Nevertheless, higher education retains an image of prestige associated with the cultural elite that is identifiable in the status, power, and financial security of academics. Because of the social model of the hero as a success and because of the hero's routine success in narratives, heroes signify superior human ability. Because of their prestige and status, academics signify superior human intellect. With the reversal technique typical of comedy, because of their esteem, heroes and academics also make for worthy comic source material.

II. An Unanswered Question

The central question has two basic interests, one that leans more towards the legacy of comic theory and the other that leans towards a comic interrogation of success and status within the Anglo-American tradition. The links between the two interests come through the choice of examples, the interest in critiquing superiority theory, the interest in critiquing the popular causal conception of success and failure, and an attempt to value uncertainty and unknowing as an important part of wisdom. By reviewing key avenues of interest that arise from the previous chapter's survey of humour theory and by briefly outlining the purpose of the corpus of examples, this section demonstrates that the central question is unique and has not been answered elsewhere through the proposed method.

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[125] It is interesting to note that each of these actors have a connection to politics. In 1968, the Republican Party recruited John Wayne for a presidential bid, but Wayne declined. In 1986, running as a Republican, Clint Eastwood was elected mayor of Carmel, California. In 2002, Eastwood became the Vice Chair of California's State Park and Recreation Committee. In 2003, Republican Schwarzenegger was elected governor of California, and earlier, from 1990 to 1993, he was the Chairman of the President's Council on Physical Fitness and Sports.

II. A. Exclusive Avenues Arising from Certain Theoretical Tendencies

Although several theorists mention the elusive quality of comical texts and even though a few have experimented with thinking beyond the three traditional theories, to the best of my knowledge, there has been no sustained attempt to understand humour as a trans-theoretical phenomenon of dynamic forces that privileges humour's capacity for fostering, creating, and appreciating ambiguity, uncertainty, and multiplicity. In fact, a recurrent difficulty in humour studies can be termed exclusivity, referring to the tendency for theories to remain exclusive, for there to be a divide between logical and non-logical understandings/categorizations of humour, and for a stress on exclusive comic categorization.

Each major humour theory offers a different perspective, but their explanations do not cancel one another out. In "Humour as a Double-Edged Sword," Meyer argues:

> Applying the three major theories of humor origin to actual messages suggests that each can illuminate only partially the functions of humor. Just as one humorous line may serve more than one rhetorical function, so it may fall under more than one humor theory. However, proponents of each theory hold that it can explain all instances of humor (Gruner, 1997; Morreall, 1983). The impact of such theoretical disputes is that any example of humor can be readily explained by the perspective of one's choice, based

> on the "theoretical sunglasses" through which one chooses to peer. (315)

While he speaks of the difficulty concerning the exclusivity of humour theories, Meyer does not extend his argument in a manner that explicitly articulates the uncertain quality of appreciating humour.

Agreeing with Meyer, Vandaele and Purdie also point out the complexity of humour discourse. In "Humor Mechanisms," Vandaele admits that if taken separately, superiority theory and incongruity theory both under-determine and over-determine humour (221-222). In her *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse*, Susan Purdie identifies joking as overdetermined:

> in every good laugh there are literally innumerable elements, involving relationship within and between the material, personalities and circumstances involved. Indeed, since at one level joking invites a breach of the rules which usually constrain meaning, it is especially susceptible to the phenomenon whereby the more any utterance is scrutinised, the more meanings associated with it are found. Furthermore, joking is also overdetermined in the sense that most of its elements can *accurately* be described in several different ways. (4)

Purdie effectively describes what E. B. White has warned: funny is elusive. This dissertation shares the view of Meyer, Vandaele, and Purdie, that studying comical texts will benefit from moving beyond the theoretical exclusivity that has traditionally dominated humour theory.

It is odd that the stress on one theory over another persists, even though humour has been repeatedly identified as something difficult to pin down. Acknowledging the general difficulty of studying humour, one may turn to Bergson. Paralleling E. B. White, in *Laughter*, Bergson says:

> The greatest of thinkers, from Aristotle downwards, have tackled this little problem, which has a knack of baffling every effort, of slipping away and escaping only to bob up again, a pert challenge flung at philosophic speculation. Our excuse for attacking the problem in our turn must lie in the fact that we shall not aim at imprisoning the comic spirit within a definition. We regard it, above all, as a living thing. However trivial it may be, we shall treat it with the respect due to life. (http://www.authorama.com/laughter-1.html)

Because humour is akin to an organic social entity, something that, in a sense, lives, it is difficult to analyze and identify in an absolute sense. Nevertheless, Bergson offers his famous and important insight: mechanical behaviour is funny.[126] Even before the invention of machines, when humans behaved like one, they are funny, because they are not demonstrating the necessary alertness and elasticity that life demands. When life demands adaptability, mechanical behaviour and rigidity is illogically inappropriate and thus funny.

Although Bergson stresses that the comical arises from the dominance of the intellect over emotion, his connection to superiority theory marks a contradiction in his approach. To Bergson's credit, he does admit that studying humour is a tricky endeavour. In Bergson's case, humour is especially tricky because, although he follows in the tradition that associated the comical with logic, the emotional triumph of Hobbes merges with Bergson's social corrective function of "laughing at." Hate may be more a matter of the heart, however darkened, than of the logically sound mind. Indeed, ideas of social correction are not always logically fair. Bergson, for instance, asks, "Why does one laugh at a negro" (http://www.authorama.com/laughter-6.html). (Please note: the next chapter, "Comic Nescience," references the following quote regarding the white cabby and black passenger). Bergson's answer illustrates his theory of disguise in comedy:

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[126] If Bergson has ever seen a military parade, then perhaps he would mistake it for a comedy. The mechanical behaviour of soldiers, or, in some instance, ritual dancing, prayers, or *Riverdance* may be interpreted as silly, but such instances do not always arouse laughter. Moreover, life is not simply governed by alertness and elasticity. One needs to sleep. In addition, at times, one may have to repeat certain drills and exercises if one wants to learn a language or make the wrestling team. All this being said, overall, Bergson's argument is a convincing and insightful view of the comical.

> I rather fancy the correct answer was suggested to me one day in the street by an ordinary cabby, who applied the expression "unwashed" to the negro fare he was driving. Unwashed! Does not this mean that a black face, in our imagination, is one daubed over with ink or soot? If so, then a red nose can only be one which has received a coating of vermilion. And so we see that the notion of disguise has passed on something of its comic quality to instances in which there is actually no disguise, though there might be. (http://www.authorama.com/laughter-6.html)

It is not logical to laugh at someone with darker skin; certainly, it is not logical to assume someone with darker skin is that way because he or she is wearing a disguise of dirt.[127] In fact, ethnic humour often employs the logical fallacy of hasty generalization. By citing the cab driver, Bergson makes room for an illogical social imagination in his work, an imagination whose norms, in this instance, cannot correct the negro fare. Nevertheless, it is logical to notice the lack of logic in the ordinary cabby.[128] As a result, the cabby can be the target of a joke, but including Bergson's argument, so can the negro. Although Bergson acknowledges the difficulty of studying humour, he does not explicitly spell out this ability for one joke to generate laughter in ways that are simultaneously logical and illogical, where, in his illustration, the butt of the joke can be either the cabby or the patron. Hence, the problem of exclusivity; rather, than treating things as white versus black, humour may be more of a grey area – that is, nonetheless, full of colour, while being off-colour.[129]

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[127] On this note, is laughing at anyone or anything simply logical? Logic may be enjoyable, but not many graffiti artists scribble syllogisms on bathroom walls. There is an important difference between the logical and the laughable. Some comical texts may have a logical component, but the comical does not equate with the logical.

[128] Everyone knows that a person with dark skin does not actually mean a person is dirty; rather, dark skin means that a person is full of rain. Observe the sky before a storm and one can notice the parallel. Fair clouds turn from grey to black, with the more moisture that they take in. By logical analogy then, it follows that a person with fair skin has less internal moisture than a person with darker skin. Confusing humour

Word play aside, dividing the humorous into either the logical or the illogical, exclusively, is also a difficulty. *American Quarterly* journal's review of Daniel Wickberg's *The Senses of Humor* requires mention. In the review "An American Passion for Humor," Stephen Kercher opens with a relevant quote from a celebrated English satirist: "Jonathan Swift once observed that "What Humor is, not all the Tribe /Of Logick-mongers can describe" (151). While logic may be a useful tool of for comedians and while comical texts, jokes, and phrases, can be explained through logic, logic is only a tool and logical explanations are not always complete. Swift's rhyme is particularly relevant, because Swift was a great satirist; satire is a form often identified with logic used for humorously didactic ends. However, Swift himself, at least in this rhyme, admits that there is more to satire than funny logic that instructs.[130] In fact, the moral

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science aside, pigmentation in the skin, according to superstitious scientists, has something to do with the amount of melanin in the skin. However, if you try to explain this to a cabby in France and you risk paying the full fare, which risks putting you "in the red," which is worse than being "in the black." With another colour to discuss, however, things just become more confusing. So, it is best to not waste space with such footnotes.

[129] Rim shot please.

[130] In *Gulliver's Travels*, the fourth book, Swift reflexively undercuts the association between logic and satire, through the excessive rationalism of the Houyhnhnyms. In *Irony*, Colebrook declares: "In Gulliver's description, the reasoning Houyhnhnms indulge in such a mania for logical purity that they become irrationally enslaved to principles of reason; their refusal of ambiguity, deception, corruption and distortion is presented as a repression of the body, of texts, of difference and history" (59).

behind a moral instruction in satire is not necessarily logical, in the strict, almost mathematical sense. A moral or principle is often abstract, appealing to an ethical ideal or social values, rather than a clear cause and effect relationship. A satire may make an argument that uses logic to uphold a principle, but what is presented is still just an argument, which by definition, is something that can be disputed by another argument, satiric or otherwise.

In his *In Praise of Comedy*, Feibleman explains the early association between logic and comedy. Feibleman says, "Character was, so to speak, a mirror of the customs and institutions whose shortcomings Aristophanes was intent on exposing. For Aristophanes well recognized the purpose of comedy: the exhibition of the shortcomings of actuality in the name of the logical order" (29). For instance, there is logic to the critique of the overconfident soldier and doctor, but logic is not all that is at work. Referring to Cornford in *In Praise of Comedy*, Feibleman says:

> The fertility drama of the year-god, the marriage of the Old Year transformed into the New, interrupted by the death and revival of the hero: this is the classic theme of Aristophanic comedy, as Professor Cornford has well shown. The stock characters of Aristophanes were "at first serious, and even awful, figures in a religious mystery: The God who every year is born and dies and rises again, his Mother and his Bride, the Antagonist who kills him, the Medicine-man who restores him to life. When the drama lost its serious magical intent, probably the Antagonist and the Doctor were the first to become grotesque. (27)

For the eventual social grounds of critic and the logic behind curing the imbalance of overconfidence, bringing someone back to life is not very logical in terms of verisimilitude.[131] In comical works, logic works with emotion, social observation, exaggeration, understatement, and other elements. If logic were the main element at work in comical phenomena, then mathematics would be hilarious.

As a tool, logic is at the disposal of the humour theorist, but one must humbly admit a difficulty of academic analysis: the perspective affects the subject studied. Perhaps the logic of academic analysis influences the way scholars view the comical. In his *Wit and Its Relation to the Unconscious*, Freud refers to Shakespeare's Hamlet, "There are more things in heaven and earth than are dreamt of in your philosophy" (674). Freud follows that quote from a critic who heavily influences Freud in this study, Lichtenberg: "But there is also much in philosophy which is found neither in heaven nor on earth" (674). It seems that exclusivity in the history of humour theory stumbles, at times, by placing the theory before the phenomena, and thus assumes that the phenomena is largely understood.[132] The perspective or perspectives of the theorist clearly influence the way the theorist analyzes his or her subject. Perhaps the logical training of analysts influences the privileging of logical elements in comical phenomena. However, the musings in this paragraph are minor. Exclusivity in analysis becomes more difficult when one specifically acknowledges comic categories.

Similar to the tendency for humour theory to be exclusive and for a logical versus non-logical divide, the categorization of comical texts has been a longstanding subject of debate. Importantly, for these exclusive tendencies, there is not only exclusivity at work, but also an implied hierarchy. For instance, even if humour is understood from multiple perspectives, superiority theory is the most important. Similarly, for some, logic is more important than the lack of logic, but, for others, the illogical is more important than the logical. With comic categorization, debates continue about what defines a proper comedy, parody, or satire, or about which category may best suit a particular text. For instance, Andrew Stott's *Comedy* and Margaret Rose's *Parody* critically survey debates surrounding the categorization of important categories. While all of the debates may be interesting, comic nescience asks to shift the discussion, to contemplate the possibility that comical texts may benefit from fostering categorical ambiguity, which increases the chances of multiple readings.

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[131] Not a comedy in the strict sense, the satiric *Candide* depicts death and violence in a non-realistic, non-logical manner, although those portions of the text that handle differing philosophies (of Pangloss and others) do so with a logical insight in the service of producing laughter.

[132] Then again, it is difficult, if not impossible, to not be connected to a perspective that biases the scholar in some way.

In summary of this subsection, various types of exclusivity in the history of humour theory open up the possibility for comic nescience to overcome exclusivity. Whether between humour theories, between logic and non-logic, or between comic categories, exclusivity allows strong arguments to appear on either side of the various debates. However, if one wants to integrate the notion that humour is elusive, then perhaps, at times, one may take a view such as that of comic nescience, and try to understand a comical text for the way it appeals to different theories, both logical sense and illogical nonsense, and the boundaries of different categories. From the perspective of comic nescience, some comical phenomena are composed of opposing and contradictory forces, rather than being the domain of only one underlying element.

II. B. The Interest in the Comic Interrogation of the Hero and the Scholar

The method of situating the hero and the scholar as emblems of confident cognizant agency and analyzing comical material to identify a tradition of Anglo-

American material that complicates a popular American conception of success also hopes to be innovative. There are numerous scholarly texts on the American dream, Horatio Alger, and the American vision of success. However, to the best of my knowledge, there are not many books articulating a comical vision of success and failure, which complicates the causal Alger schema. By selecting works that interrogate the confident cognizant agency upheld by the hero and the scholar, this dissertation hopes to supply a new and insightful glimpse into perhaps an underemphasized Anglo-American comical tradition. The choice of texts (in terms of medium, especially) is rather diverse, including short stories, parodic essays, films, and stand up comedy routines. Because comic nescience allows one to look at texts in ways that appreciate their ambiguity (between theoretical approaches, logic or non-logic, and categorization), the thesis attempts to offer fresh interpretations, which, I hope will lead to a greater appreciation of the comic artistry and insight of the chosen comical texts.

III. The Value of Pursuing the Central Research Question

The central research question leads to the presentation of a perspective towards understanding humorous texts in the Anglo-American tradition. Although the examples are more contemporary, to overcome the tendency in film and media studies to focus upon a relatively recent period of texts and theories, the dissertation utilizes theory dating back to ancient Greece.[133] Pursuing the central question and investigating the selected corpus are valuable for several reasons.

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[133] While a film centric approach may have been helpful to distinguish film studies from other fields, similar to the tendency towards the auteur approach, film and media studies may benefit from an acknowledgment of connections (and even differences) from other mediums as well as a wider tradition of theories and approaches.

Chapter four, "Comic Nesience," is valuable for at least three major reasons. One, because it accepts varying theoretical insights as well as the elusive quality of humour, chapter four offers an alternative perspective that does not cancel out the value of alternative theories or claim to have solved the mystery of humour. Two, because comic nescience stresses multiplicity, its vision of humour may be especially appropriate for American culture, which struggles to create one nation, undivided, yet exists as a heterogeneous or pluralistic society. Rather than assigning exclusive categories, because comic nescience stresses the relationship between, for instance, the ideal and practice, success and failure, intelligence and unintelligence, the elusive element of dynamic tension in funniness hopes to be, at least partially, observable by this analysis. Three, because the comical is linked to a dynamic tension that offers a complicated superimposition of potential meaning, the comic struggle between the human pursuit of an ideal vision and the human fumbling of such a vision requires an expansion of the notion of a happy ending.

Chapters five and six explore the comic interrogation of the hero and the scholar, respectively. Chapter five, "The Western Mythos of Success," is valuable, because it explores the popular American conception of success and identifies a parallel comical tradition that complicates the causal association between hard work, ethics, and success. Chapter six, "Serious Intellect," investigates the prestige and power of the intellectual individual. Since chapter six identifies the academic as a persona, the connection between intellect and identity is complicated. The academic is an interesting figure to analyze, because although there is a general North American belief in equal access to education, the academic persona is one of superiority and privilege. Both chapters are valuable for their multi-media, interdisciplinary analysis, highlighting a link between literature, film, and stand up comedy. In addition, through comic nescience's stress on dynamic tension between comical forces, these chapters hope to offer multiple readings that enrich the understanding of the texts presented.

Chapter IV: Comic Nescience

> nor did Alice think it so *very* much out of the way
> to her the Rabbit say to itself, "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall
> be too late!" (when she thought it over afterwards, it
> occurred to her that she ought to have wondered at this,
> but at the time it all seemed quite natural)
> Carroll, Lewis, *Alice in Wonderland*, 6[134]

Introduction to Comic Nescience

In the process of examining a subject, like Alice, one may prematurely claim understanding only to wonder afterwards about an oversight. Once set aside, this dissertation may reveal several glaring white rabbits that will haunt the author. For now, however, this dissertation focuses on locating a rascally rabbit or two that perhaps were not missed because of oversight, but because of emphasis or for the sake of debate with other approaches. Building upon past and present theoretical knowledge and debates, comic nescience offers an alternative approach to understanding comical texts. This offering does not claim to replace existing theories, nor does this dissertation assert that comic nescience is applicable to all instances of comical expressions, across time and cultures. Rather, this dissertation is an exploration of possibilities. The extended experiment begins by delving into the possibility of re-thinking five major ideas that characterize an aspect of humour studies. The first idea is exclusivity, which relates to two areas, theory and comical category. Area one develops as follows: instead of choosing a side and engaging in the ongoing debate between the three major theories, comic nescience asks for greater flexibility in handling comical theories, because comical phenomena may be viewed in multiple ways. Area two develops in the following manner: instead of engaging in a debate over the appropriate classifications and definitions of the various comical categories, comic nescience claims that comical texts benefit from fostering categorical ambiguity. The second idea is an assumption linking class with the politics (or lack of it) in humour and wit. With the advent of popular culture studies during the latter part of the twentieth century, comic nescience claims the relationship between class and political values is unclear. The third idea is the belief in a logical and illogical divide in comic theory and in comic practice. Comic nescience urges readers to change their focus from locating a hierarchical divide to noticing a dynamic tension between logical and illogical thinking, intellect and emotion, as well as the buffoon and the trickster. With the fourth idea, comic nescience accepts the value of superiority theory, but claims the language (especially the notion of a triumphant intellectual insight) of superiority theory is too strong. As a result, the wisdom of the complementary dynamic of unknowing and knowing may be overlooked, but comic nescience hopes to recuperate such wisdom by acknowledging the value of flexible humility. The fifth and final idea relates specifically to this dissertation's placement of comic nescience within a corpus of primarily American works, with three areas of interest. For area one, a multiplicity of interpretation and an ambiguity of categorization may be especially suitable for American works, which function within a pluralistic society with a literate (and thus educated) public. For area two, Aristotle's notion that the comical engages with the gap between the ideal and practice may function in American society as a historical tension between certain principles and the shortcomings of human practice. Building upon area two, area three asks for a widening of the notion of the structural comedic happy ending when placed within the American context.

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[134] From the collection, *The Best of Lewis Carroll.*

> There is a story about a man suffering from depression who goes to see his doctor. After a cursory examination, the physician turns and says, 'There is only one cure for you. You must go see Grimaldi the clown.' 'Sir,' replied the patient, 'I am Grimaldi the clown' (Dickens, 1968: 13). This story, retold by Charles Dickens in his *Memoirs of Joseph Grimaldi* (1838), seems credible enough because of our cultural familiarity with the concept of the weeping clown, the comedian who uses laughter to conceal their misery . . . How have we arrived at this idea that laughter is the close cousin of pain, and that our comedy is as expressive of upset as it is of joy?
>
> Andrew Stott, *Comedy*, 146

I. Multiplicity in Theorization and Ambiguity in Categorization

Perhaps Stott's question can be answered by the ancient Greeks, who valued seriousness and, according to Sanders in *Sudden Glory*, who (as mentioned in chapter two) identified a link between laughter and crying. Sanders says: "The idea of the seriocomic can be traced back as far as the Cynics and Stoics" (79).[135] The small gap and perhaps overlap between laughter and pain points to the possibility of characterizing comical phenomena in a way that addresses its ambiguity.

I. A. Theoretical Blur

While the approach is different from traditional theoretical lines, comic nescience does not cancel out the major theoretical approaches.[136] Describing the relationship between the teller and the listener and the joke (or comic text) is one that is disputed and uncertain, or nescient, dependent upon the theoretical camp to which one subscribes. The theoretical framework influences how one perceives the relationship between teller, listener, and comic material.

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[135] Referring to this historical link between crying and laughter does not mean that some comic artists are genuinely upset or depressed.

[136] In "Humor as a Double-Edged Sword," Meyer illustrates: "For instance, one printed announcement in a church bulletin noted that "Weight Watchers will meet at 7:00 p.m. Please use the large double door at the side entrance." If one experiences humor from this written remark, relief theory proponents could argue that the humor stems from the tension released when receivers realize that the juxtaposition of the meeting announcement and reference to the large door was not directed at the receiver personally. Incongruity proponents could claim that the humor results from the surprise at seeing such a recommendation for entry following a serious announcement for a group of people concerned about their weight. The reference to the large doors violates social norms of politeness and respect, among others; thus the incongruity can result in humor. Superiority theory proponents, in turn, could argue that the humor originates simply from the implied put-down of overweight people by reference to their particular problems (i.e., needing larger doors). Thus, any of the three theories of humor origin can ideally explain any instance of humor, and the debate continues" (315). While Meyer, also identifies how the three major theories only partly describe

For instance, consider the major ways each theory approaches humour; in addition, notice how each approach requires qualification that merges one theory with the next. For a superiority theorist, joking is an aggressive attack on a comical butt, characterized as stupid or as an outsider. However, the comical target can also be the teller, as in self-deprecatory humour, with some stand up comedians building a persona with a strong element of self-deprecation, such as Jack Benny, Richard Lewis, Rodney Dangerfield, and Woody Allen. A comedian may be known for his aggressiveness, but also be open to self-criticism, self-assessment, and self-directed humour, with Richard Pryor being a prime example. For instance, Pryor's body of work is at once aggressive social criticism (against racism especially) and revealing confession (about his addictions and violent behaviour). Along with the qualification of both an external and internal comic target, superiority theory is uncertain (or nescient) about how serious or how playful comical aggression is. Artistic intent is only one part of the equation; audience reaction and response also serves an important role. A play theorist places joking into the

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comic communication, Meyer does not develop the idea in the same way as developed here. Meyer's interest is rhetoric and his chart of comic communication is insightful and useful. However, this study takes the simultaneously application of different theories in a different direction. Meyer emphasizes how comic communication can be controlled by the speaker, whereas in this study, comic communication is more explicitly uncertain, where at times, the speaker may be in greater or lesser control over his or her comical communication. Moreover, this study is interested in more than a speaker's rhetorical use of humour. Here, the variance in understanding a comical text is more pervasive, existing for not only different audiences with different tastes, but also for the individual. Hence, an individual may understand a single joke in a simultaneous number of ways. Alternatively, an individual may understand a comic text in different exclusive ways on different occasions. Here, even when taken together, the three major theories can still only explain humour partially, because joking is an overdetermined concept, with too many variables to concretely and fully understand.

realm of recreation, but the social and political implications of play exhibit a vast range. If joking is wilful play, a socially sanctioned taboo-breaking experience of non-bona-fide communication, then the subversive element is minimal, if non-existent. If joking is the antithesis of serious discourse, social decorum, and Puritan standards, then joking can be highly subversive. A central cultural festival for the play approach is the Carnival, where social norms and taboos flip around. Regardless of whether such flipping is conservative or subversive, or a bit of both, play theory admits that joking around involves challenging present conventions by twisting them around, with role reversals, and the like. Similarly, for an incongruity theorist, joking involves a surprising twist, which indicates a knowing game that both teller and listener enjoy – a way of enjoying and perhaps mastering riddles, puns, and other confusing elements of language. Conversely, an incongruity theorist may stress the way jokes continually seek to confuse, and thus challenge one's mastery of slippery language, discourse, and pattern seeking. As should be evident, all of these interpretations from the major theoretical schools, and reactions in between the major vantage points, are possible. As evident by the overlapping elements of each theoretical tradition, it may be counter-intuitive to pin joking, humour, and the comic down to only one function. Rather, acknowledging the nescience (getting the joke/not getting the joke, laughing/not laughing, being offended/not being offended) of the way audiences receive a joke (from playful acceptance to serious offence), is crucial to the way jokes function in everyday social discourse and in comical art.

A mistake of superiority theorists, as well as play and incongruity theorists, is to make far-reaching claims that overlook the fact that a joke may play differently to different audiences, or even to the same audience on different nights. If the evocation of laughter – let alone feelings of superiority, social conformity, rebelliousness, or ideological questioning – is nescient, then, less immediate reactions, would also be vibrating with some lack of clarity and multiple readings. Seen in this manner, after listening to a joke, an individual may feel superior, playful, nothing at all, or a combination of feelings. This uncertainty evident in each theory calls for the establishment of an appropriate term, of which comic nescience may be a suitable descriptor. Because it does not exclusively advocate one perspective and because it does not accept the totalizing claim implied by each theory, comic nescience allows for the co-existence of overlapping theoretical perspectives.

I. B. Finding and Fostering Ambiguity in Comic Categorization

Paralleling how humour theorists engage in debates with one another to describe comic phenomena, scholars have engaged in important debates concerning the appropriate definition of key comical categories, such as comedy, parody, irony, satire, wit, and humour. As with comic theory, while debates about definition and categorization are highly valuable, they may overlook the value of ambiguity. An artist may benefit from nurturing some level of categorical ambiguity, merging, for instance, elements from comedy, parody, and satire into one work. Whether discovering or deliberately fostering ambiguity, texts may benefit from debatable categorization.

In terms of surveying the various definitional debates, one may briefly consider the varying perspectives. For Leggatt, lovers and a feast constitute comedy, while for Stott, comedy is multi-lateral. For Rose, parody is fundamentally comic, while for Butler, parody becomes a gender and sexuality driven variation of Goffman's social personae. For Booth, irony is a specific speech act comprehended by a community; for Colebrook, irony signals the very instability of a linguistic community.[137] Indirectly, when they notice or debate the mix of elements in a work, scholars provide greater interest in the complexity of comical texts. Scholars continue to dispute whether it is better to describe *Don Quixote* as a parody or a satire; such disputes are valuable and important. However, there is enough room in a piece of complex comic art to make a convincing case that a work is a mix of comedy, parody, and satire, even though one category may be dominant.

An aspect of academic debates includes the placement of the varying categories on an artistic hierarchy. For instance, comedy is associated with a festive cultural ritual, populated with lowly figures and stock types, while parody is a derivative type of mockery. In contrast, the supposedly more complex irony and satire are higher up the artistic scale. To a certain degree, class influences artistic hierarchy. Jonathan Swift was an educated member of a higher class delivering literary pieces for an educated audience. In contrast, a nameless clown in the *commedia dell'arte* would be delivering comic material outside the sphere of high literature, on a European cobblestone street to uneducated onlookers. Referring to early eighteenth-century England's class bias, Barry Sanders, in *Sudden Glory*, says:

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[137] Claire Colebrook, in *Irony*, explains how the intersection of irony and postmodernism raises some confusion. Colebrook says: "One way to understand postmodernity is to see it as a radical rejection or redefinition of irony . . . One could be ironic, not by breaking with contexts but in recognising any voice as an effect of context, and then allowing contexts to generate as much conflict, collision and contradiction as possible, thereby precluding any fixity or meta-position" (164). Alternatively, Colebrook offers: "one could see postmodernity as the impossibility of overcoming irony. Any attempt to reduce the world to discourses, contexts, language-games or relative points of view would itself generate a point of view of recognition: the point of view of the postmodernist who continually affirms the end of meta-narratives, the point of view that is *other* than the beliefs of feminism, Marxism, nationalism or any other belief in identity" (164-165). For Colebrook, "Neither position is possible, and yet both seem inevitable" (165).

> With outright laughter outlawed, and with a rise in literacy that began to encompass greater numbers and classes of people, subversion began to be accomplished in more subtle, decorous ways. One can describe irony and satire as humor biting away, not from the edges, the margins and the extremes, but from those "in the know" – from aristocrats themselves – producing a curious kind of silent laughter. Irony and satire in effect can be read as ridicule with class. Irony clothes itself in respectability and thus is particularly suited to the class-minded sensibility of the Enlightenment. Satire instructs just like laughter, carries all the sting of an aggressive joke, but it denotes without the mess and noise of a bona fide joke. (234)

Certainly, class is a factor and Sanders speaks of it well, but class is not the only factor; (wit and humour will be discussed later). There is enough overlap between the varying comic categories for theorists to continue navigating and debating the boundaries of comedy, parody, pastiche, irony, and satire.

Despite differences partly attributable to social biases, an overlap between comedy, parody, and satire illustrates categorical permeability. Like comedy, satire offers humorous ridicule.[138] In comedy, ridicule usually comes at the expense of stock characters. In satire, ridicule may be more intense, fuelled by a more specific, contemporary target and social message. For Bergson and Frye, ridicule is purposeful, correcting an imbalanced psychology and re-balancing the social order. Correcting a comically flawed figure is a didactic gesture, not too far removed from the didacticism of satire. Irony, like parody, and a simple joke, rests upon incongruity. In "Humor Mechanisms," by referring to Van Besien's *Ironie als Parasitaire Taalhandeling* (*Irony*

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[138] In the 2002 *Poetics Today* article, "Humor Mechanisms," Jeroen Vandaele refers to Hutcheon's *A Theory of Parody*, to highlight the difficult relationship between humour and irony: "Hutcheon (1994, 25-26) correctly observes that the "humor/irony" problem is two-directional: not all humor can be called ironic, but conversely, "not all ironies are amusing . . . – though some are." To my knowledge, the work that has been done on this intertwined delimitation problem is rather poor, since most scholars have dealt either with humor or with irony" (239).

as a parasitic speech act), Vandaele points out the following: "irony, apart from its rather social and superiority-based aspects (sympathy or aggression through evaluation), also lives on pragmatic incongruities" (240).[139] In *Parody*, like irony, for Rose, parody involves incongruous pairing. The overlapping elements of comedy, parody, and irony signal a difficulty in easily identifying a comic text as belonging to only one category. Furthermore, comic artists may foster an air of generic uncertainty, to thwart easy interpretation and create more possibilities to inspire laughter. Parody and irony share the incongruous referencing of a serious convention, style, or text: for instance, a known text, in the case of parody, or a phrase, in the case of spoken irony. Comedy, parody, and irony all confuse the normal reception of serious art, because, to varying degrees, they reference and may serve as a counterbalance to their more serious siblings. A comedy of a bumbling hero references the serious action hero or chivalric knight. A parody more explicitly references other works, devices, and characters. Irony offers a superimposition of messages, so that a statistical and scientific-sounding essay with mathematical computation like "A Modest Proposal," is at once serious in delivery, but satirical in aim.

Despite the specific satirical intent of "A Modest Proposal," if one acknowledges the existence of differing readership communities, the essay can lead to multiple meanings; this potential for multiple readings enhances its artistic complexity. Assuming there were fewer individuals of the lower class who were literate during Swift's day, there may be many upper class educated readers, who "laugh at" the poor. In this way, the object of ridicule is the impoverished lower class; they are no better than animals, easily slaughtered and eaten. Acknowledging the race bias between the British and Irish, such a reading becomes more plausible, and more humorous in a ridiculing, ostracizing, and prejudicial manner. The essay, for some, could be delivering the lesson that the lower classes are indeed worthless hunks of meat. Although some readers may not take the essay in a literal fashion, by advocating cannibalism, they may nonetheless take the essay as a validation of superiority and perhaps even as an argument for war or genocide.

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[139] Vandaele translates Van Besien's title as *Irony as a parasitic speech act*.

Alternatively, and more typically, "A Modest Proposal" is not a call for eating children, but an attack on the complacency surrounding the treatment of poverty; specifically, Swift claims the cruelty of ignoring poverty is akin to eating children, employing a reversal on the notion that a society should protect and nurture its children. This typical interpretation rests upon the social reference points of the readers. For a conservative, upper class racist, the satire may be different from a more sympathetic, literate contemporary view. The notion of literacy brings up another point, the readership. Sanders in *Sudden Glory* claims the essay is a revolutionary and subversive critique, heralding it as "The most well-known essay in the English language" (231). In particular, the essay is popular because of its deft use of satire, hiding its critique of the self-serving elite through a ridicule of the impoverished. Certainly, this has been the essay's legacy in high school and University English courses throughout North America. However, such a reading denies the limit of its call to action, especially when one acknowledges that the satire can not only be read in the typical sense (disguised words pointing to an indirect, but particular, meaning), but also can point to at least two radically opposed comical targets: the selfish elite's attitudes or the impoverished themselves. The readership's political slant matters. Considering both readings, "A Modest Proposal," rests upon a risky dynamic of reading or misreading. Such a dynamic can be placed under comic nescience's general approach of appreciating the dynamic tension of comical forces that make up a humorous text. As is evident, contradictory (but humorous) readings exist as a crucial element of quality comic art.

Before moving into a neutral reading, it is important to note how "A Modest Proposal" is not simply pointing to an external target. If the satire believes in widespread values, such as the value of human life, then there is a belief in some sort of equal right to life for the English and the Irish. Swift's criticism, although it may be specifically identified as a criticism of certain politicians and public policy, is also a form of satirical self-deprecation, a criticism of the human inability or lack of attention towards solving poverty. In *The Difference Satire Makes*, Frederic V. Bogel offers the following view:

> the crucial fact is not that satirists find folly or wickedness in the world and then wish to expose that alien something. Instead, satirists identify in the world something or someone that is both unattractive and curiously or dangerously like them, or like the culture or subculture that they identify with or speak for, or sympathetic even as it is repellent—something, then, that is *not alien enough*. 41

More than simply ridiculing an external target, satire acknowledges a kinship (via popular or universal values) in all people, including target and teller.

A neutral reading of "A Modest Proposal" is possible, by stressing the text as parody. The essay manifests classical five-part Greek speech structure, as well as embodying a style, described in *Sudden Glory* as the "embryonic genre of eighteenth-century record-keeping" (232). Appropriately, Sanders says: "Swift exploits words like *reckoning* and *number*, *computation* and *accounting*, to give his proposal the tone of mathematical accuracy and scientific believability" (232). Outside of a specific political context, the proposal of eating children is simply absurd; indeed, for those who lack an understanding of the historical situation or essay structure, the text still plays well as parody.[140] In the multi-lateral sense, "A Modest Proposal" is a comedy, because it provokes laughter. At first glance, the essay bears least resemblance to a comedy in the specific and traditional sense, for there are no young lovers blocked by a patriarchal authority; however, the notion of a community-building comic solution permeates the text, solving a social problem, quite literally, with a feast. In other words, "A Modest Proposal" embodies (literally and thus reflexively) the comic solution reserved for the traditional comedic trajectory; in addition, the essay's legal style provides similarities to a comedy's (via Frye) problem-solving element. Typifying its multiplicity, "A Modest Proposal" displays a range of simultaneously available readings; accepting the essay's multiplicity highlights the importance of fostering uncertainty in humorous works.

Along with the similarities between comedy and satire, by definition, parody and satire include a mixture of styles; however, the level of mixture is not specified, rather it is left uncertain, perhaps for the reader/critic to decide or dispute. For eighteenth-century record-keepers, "A Modest Proposal" may be more of a parody, than a political satire, whereas for an Irish nationalist, the text may be subversive, or a tragic-comic mockery of the neglect by the wealthy and apathetic English. Still others may not find "A Modest Proposal" humorous at all, which points to the persistent quality of nescience that seems to be fundamentally associated with and perhaps necessary for some texts. "A Modest Proposal" is all these interpretations and more, for the art of a text lies not in the ability to pinpoint a target, create a playful mood, release taboo feelings, or construct incongruous moments. Rather, a quality text may do any combination of or all of these things for differing readers. The combination of factors or the ultimate end (to make one feel superior, to make one feel playful, to make one feel surprised) is too variable to limit to one conclusion, hence the organization of such artistic ambiguity via comic nescience.

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[140] On that note, it may be crucial for a comic text to be funny without demanding too much of the reader in terms of serious subtleties. Thurber's "University Days," reads well as an anecdotal account; Cosby's "Lone Ranger" skit holds up comically (and artistically) without delving into or drawing excessive attention to the politics of the ethnic sidekick. Although serious points are implied, the overall cheerful mood for laughter is not seriously altered. The texts remain comical, instead of veering into an analytical lecture.

The risk and power of satire, like "A Modest Proposal," is that it can be misunderstood; for instance, a few may take it as a serious solution, others may see it as a critique of poverty and applaud it, while others may think of it as a grave insult, doing little to actually help poverty. Satires like "A Modest Proposal," bear a hoax-like quality that seeks to fool or at least make the reader second-guess the text's validity and intent.[141] Although the quality of being misunderstood has been important to defining satire, the potential for misunderstanding is a central dynamic of comic communication in general. For instance, if a joke deliberately thwarts expectation, offering two inconsistent scripts, instead of fulfilling one pattern, then some level of miscommunication is flirted with at the level of joking. The listener may not "get" or understand the joke, because he or she does not see the alternative pattern offered by the teller. This may be a fault of the listener, in terms of not being able to flexibly switch mindset to accept another conception of things. Alternatively, misunderstanding a joke may be the fault of the teller, who perhaps does not have the correct rhythm, timing, and so on. Perhaps the listener and teller are lacking a shared reference upon which the joke pivots.[142] The point is there are several reasons for a joke to fail, or, conversely, succeed. In addition, there is an overlap between the serious and unserious. "A Modest Proposal," is effective satire, because readers understand the essay in a simultaneously serious and unserious manner. From the perspective of comic nescience, this quality of overlapping seriousness and unseriousness signals a general non-exclusive dynamic of several comical texts and performances. Engaging with the comical invokes a blur of the serious and the unserious. For instance, serious social standards may be evoked, but they may be treated in an unserious manner. Alternatively, the overall intent of a comical text may be highly serious or highly unserious. Rather than describing the serious or unserious element in comical texts in a mutually exclusive manner, perhaps a dynamic of potentially overlapping forces is more appropriate a description in some cases. Comic art does not always guarantee an appropriate response.[143] Comic nescience acknowledges the

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[141] In this way, like a hoax, a satire may more easily hides its surprise, than a text that declares its humorous intent from the outset, like a parody or comedy.

[142] In "Funny Fiction," Christina Larkin Galiñanes describes the importance of shared references: "when someone tells a joke which begins with ''There was an Englishman, an Irishman, and a Scotsman,'' this introduction not only announces a joke, and hence produces humorous expectations, but it also immediately evokes the corresponding stereotypes from the listener's encyclopaedic knowledge. The humor in such jokes lies in the tension between, on the one hand, the fact that the receiver thinks immediately of certain characteristics attached to his or her stereotyped images and therefore forms specific expectations and, on the other hand, the fact that the outcome of the situation thus introduced is incongruous in view of the

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listener's general sense of appropriateness and, in the best jokes, surprising even in view of his or her expectations but is nevertheless in some way coherent with the latter. The pleasure of the receiver would seem to derive not only from surprise and incongruity, but also from the satisfaction of having his or her expectations confirmed and, in the worst of cases, his or her prejudices reaffirmed. For example, there's the one about the Scotsman who is staggering home after a night out at the pub with a half-empty bottle of whiskey in his coat pocket. He sways around, trips over his feet and suddenly falls down. As he is lying on the ground, he feels himself to see if anything is broken and finds that his leg is covered with a warmish liquid. ''Please God,'' he says, ''Let it be blood!''" (87). Depending upon the listener's tastes, such a joke may arouse laughter, no laughter, offence, or, most likely, it will prompt the listener to be extremely careful with his or her bottle of whiskey.

[143] The art of stand up, and, possibly, comedy, in general, rests upon a certain level of risk. The comedian does not know how the audience will respond to any one joke, but he or she hopes that the audience will perform laughter at the appropriate times. In the final ten pages of the epilogue of *Sudden Glory*, Sanders uses half of those pages to present Chaplin as an artist who needs to control his product; for Sanders, the genius of Chaplin partly lies in the ability to act in, direct, and score *The Great Dictator* with originality. Chaplin is against tyranny, but in his art, Chaplin must be in full control – Sanders figures Chaplin as a creative tyrant, a control freak not unlike a military dictator. Although this perspective is appreciated, creative control in Hollywood differs greatly from ordering mass genocide or sparking world war. Navigating the relationship between control and originality, it may be valid that Chaplin's voice permeates varying elements of his product, but Sanders needs to remember that Chaplin was from vaudeville, where stock gags predate his performances. The pratfall was not Chaplin's invention, neither was the lowly comic protagonist who bumbles through slapstick adventures. Note, for instance, how the signature gag of dancing bread shoes from *The Gold Rush* is borrowed from Roscoe "Fatty" Arbuckle. In the 1917 film (starring Arbuckle and Keaton) *The Rough House*, Arbuckle makes breakfast rolls dance, but while Arbuckle's earlier version is forgotten, Chaplin's imitation is taken as a mark of his originality and thus genius. The famous shoe-eating sequence in *The Gold Rush* is a parodic reference to the lost Donner party

dynamic of understanding/misunderstanding as basic to comical communication, as is the dynamic of seriousness/non-seriousness. Fostering categorical ambiguity may work in favour of the artist, because it allows for a wider variety of laughter producing avenues. Even though the major theoretical schools and theorists have stressed the successful delivery of comic material, it is crucial to identify the fact that comic delivery involves some level of uncertainty and risk – which can also be grouped under the concept of comic nescience. While the comical frog may be elusive, artists may enhance such ambiguity through at least one method, multiplicity, including elements and techniques from differing categories in one work. By identifying a dynamic of tensions, comic nescience treats varying comic forces as interdependent.

I was took by a fly,
Says a Fish, but I deny
That, for had he not took the fly
At first in his mouth,
He had not, in truth,
Then have been tost up so high.[144]

II. Humour, Wit, Class, and Popular Culture

Ridicule has been central to the characterization of the comical experience since ancient Greece, while the ludicrous has been especially important to discussions about

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that has to resort to eating their moccasins and then cannibalism. Chaplin borrowed from other comic artists, used stock comic characterizations, and parodied history. Similarly, while *The Great Dictator* references Hitler, according to *The Art of Comedy Writing*, Berger identifies the braggart soldier as a stock figure, typified in *Miles Gloriosus* by Titus Maccius Plautus. Chaplin is original in many ways, but being a vaudeville artist, he is not entirely original; nevertheless, outside the Romantic conception of genius as associated with originality, being derivative in some ways and more original in other ways, Chaplin is still a great artist, who has had a cultural impact beyond, perhaps, anything he could have controlled.

[144] From John Ashton's *Humour, Wit and Satire of the Seventeenth Century*.

humour since the rise of incongruity theory.[145] A glimpse into the historical development of humour and wit (as specific concepts) will reveal the need to qualify wit in contemporary times.

In terms of the historical development of humour theory, it is interesting to note that although Aristotle mentions incongruity, the notion of "laughing at" a target dominated humour theory for centuries. In *Senses of Humor*, Daniel Wickberg says Sydney Smith articulated the important difference between humour of character and humour of incongruity, during a series of lectures in 1804, 1805, and 1806 at the Royal Institution. Wickberg claims: "the notion of incongruity allowed Smith to abstract humor entirely from both character and its representation, thus effecting a final break from its roots in humoral medicine and medieval notions of personhood" (39). Smith's conception is a major departure from that element of superiority theory that stresses there is something to "laugh at" in people, a sense of pseudo-logical difference that makes a cabby think of a black man in France as dirty. Wickberg explains the importance of Sydney Smith's lectures:

> Once humor was established as a mode of representation, rather than a natural substance or quality, it could point in two directions: to the object it represents, which is to say, character; and to the subject who represents it, and consequently the subjective logic by which the representation is accomplished. The measure of the triumph of the subjective meaning of humor in Smith's analysis is the extent to which the object of representation becomes obliterated. The object appears only as an arbitrary instance or occasion for the true common principle of humor, which

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[145] For an incongruity theorist, a joke's surprise twist may indicate a knowing game that both teller and listener enjoy – a way of enjoying and perhaps mastering riddles, puns, and other confusing elements of language. In this way, superiority theory is not too far from this variation of incongruity theory, specifically known as incongruity-resolution theory. As already indicated, the serious implications of a joke's set up, followed by an incongruous shift relates to the notion of relief in play theories. Alternatively, an incongruity theorist may stress the way jokes continually seek to confuse, and thus challenge one's mastery of slippery language, discourse, and pattern seeking.

> is a principle of mind and subjective assessment. Character, for Smith, appears incidental to humor; it is the principle of representation in the mind, the principle of incongruity, that is essential. (40)

Put another way, Wickberg declares: “Humor is no longer "in" character; at best, it is "about" character, and character is increasingly incidental to it” (41). As a result, the witty conversationalist is not simply observing a fault in a comic target, but deliberately exaggerating, enhancing, or even creating the fault.

Balancing Smith’s contribution, superiority theory (via Hobbes) does acknowledge that the comic target is not natural. Wickberg says, for the highly influential Hobbes, “laughter arises out of social relations, practices, and the relative evaluation of persons and things, rather than the nature of things themselves” (55). As it relates to play theory, the stress on incongruity alters comical exchange into more of a game:

> the normative evaluation of laughter underwent a significant, if not quite so profound and abiding, change during the same period. Laughter, which seemed to occupy such a prominent place in the drawing rooms of "polite society," as well as in the coffeehouses and public spaces of English cities, came to seem less an expression of antipathy, and more a result of cleverness and gamesmanship. (55)

When seen in this manner, the major theoretical boundaries become even more blurred. Specifically, the emotional impulse of humour argued by superiority theorists finds an intellectual counterpart in the incongruity of ideas.

Sydney Smith’s lectures signify a key moment in the development of humour theory, crystallizing developments in superiority theory (via Hobbes), stressing an element of play theory (humour as game), through a technical device, incongruity. In comparison to the superiority theorists, as described in Wickberg's *Senses of Humor*, Sydney recognizes that inferiority may be one necessary cause of laughter, but asserts inferiority is not a sufficient cause (56). Rather, incongruity is the primary and necessary cause of laughter. The influence of incongruity as a means of explaining both comedy of character and comedy of manners (or idea) leads to a further blurring of comic theory. Incongruity also leads to a distinction between humour and wit.

Beginning especially in the late eighteenth century, humour and wit become categories for modes of artistic representation. Wickberg explains:

> Although wit and humor are not so closely linked today, "humor" having become a predominant umbrella term of which "wit" is often a subcategory, the nineteenth-century linkage of the terms leaves its residue in the present. For instance, the main Library of Congress subject heading for material that today we would call "humor," is in fact "wit and humor," as if the implied union and distinction of the two terms were obvious, which they surely were to nineteenth-century librarians. (58)

Just over a century after Smith's lectures, as early as 1924, in *The Nature of Laughter*, J. C. Gregory claimed that the history of wit "is a record of a degeneration of meaning" (127). In *Laughter*, Bergson acknowledges the difficulty of distinguishing wit in the following manner:

> A word is said to be comic when it makes us laugh at the person who utters it, and witty when it makes us laugh at either a third party or at ourselves. But in most cases we can hardly make up our minds whether the word is comic or witty. All that we can say is that it is laughable. (http://www.authorama.com/laughter-9.html)

In more recent times, as the debate (in the dissertation's introduction) between Eco and Bakhtin illustrates, humour and wit are not very closely aligned, transforming instead into debates about comedy and humour, comedy and carnival, or traditional and postmodern variations of comical categories. However, for a time, humour and wit described different types of comedy and because of this historical differentiation, humour and wit continue to harbour specific meanings, albeit they are terms used rather inconsistently. Because of its association with a character trait, character comedy is Jonsonian (following his theory of humours). The humour theory connection updates superiority theory's laughter as ridicule. Because audiences laugh at humorous figures, character comedy is humour. Comedy of manners (or idea) takes on the emerging seventeenth and eighteenth century conception of wit as an endeavour of the intellectual upper crust.

The issue of class and creative agency are important here. In *Taking Humour Seriously*, Jerry Palmer says that beginning in the Neo-Classical period, combined with a shift away from popular folk culture, new norms of social intercourse emerged "that are nowadays called 'manners,' but which in the neo-classical period were more usually called 'civility' or 'politeness.' The core of these manners is twofold: first, a certain policing of the body; second, the acquisition of a certain gracefulness" (132). From English and German grammar schools through the Jesuits, the value of rhetorical training spreads across Europe. Education, or, more accurately, using verbiage signifying formal education and class, becomes a marker of prestige, separating the intellectual from the common individual, who because he or she lacks the privileged access to such education, is identifiably less intelligent. By the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Palmer notes a "withdrawal of respectable people from all forms of popular culture" (128). A shift away from folk culture and an explicit interest in manners influences distinctions between humour and wit. Humour of the body is the domain of the uncultured, accenting a hierarchical divide between physical humour and intellectual humour, or, more specifically verbal wit. If the focus is class politics, then this body/mind, low/high division is one means of policing the populace, differentiating between class by mapping crude humour onto the folk, but reserving wit as an ability of the elite.[146]

Theory surrounding how humour and wit arouses laughter accentuates the division between low and high humour. Channelling Plato's ridicule to an act performed by those without manners, "laughing at" something natural (crude bodily music) is instinctual. In contrast, wit is a celebration of linguistic ingenuity, an intellectual appreciation of an intellectual feat, achieved through cultured education. From this divisive vantage point, because it rests upon laughable types, a comedy of characters lacks the art of a comedy of manners or idea. Implying certain audiences do not have the capability of artistic appreciation, comedy of character or humour is associated with the middle classes, while comedy of idea or wit is associated at first with aristocrats, and then, in the twentieth century, with intellectuals. The changes from ridicule to the wit and humour distinction signals a shift in understanding the comical, from natural/social to artistic. In *Sense of Humor*, Wickberg says: wit and humour "share a common ontological foundation" in incongruity (60). Understanding the comical as a creation, either in character or idea is a major step, but it is a step not fully taken, because of the continual contest for domination between theories, specifically, due to the persuasive power of superiority theory.

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[146] However, this association is not automatic for everyone; for instance, as (in *Taking Humour Seriously*) Palmer indicates, Alexander Pope distinguishes between wit as refined taste from true wit, as a creative act (137).

If comedy of character is humour, then humour is lesser than wit, because the implied audience is middle class and character comedy is not really an artistic creation. Superiority theory resurfaces. Because wit appeals to those at first with greater class and then those with greater intelligence and because wit involves creativity, wit is a superior art form. In *Wit and its Relation*, referring to jest and wit, Freud says: "if this utterance is substantial and valuable, the jest changes into wit" (722). For Freud, wit has serious aims: "wit is really never purposeless even if the thought contained therein has no tendency and merely serves a theoretical, intellectual interest" (722). Although Freud includes a list of techniques, Freud downplays the craft of wit, in order to reinforce the superiority bias of ridicule, claiming verbal invectives replace expressions of violent hostility (697). Downplaying the playful art of wit, Freud believes wit allows people to be aggressively or sexually impulsive, gaining pleasure from libidinal urges (698).[147]

Creativity in character comedy is less possible, because the notion of imbalanced humours implies a natural state that is laughable, as opposed to the artistic rendering of a humorous character. The association of wit with political subversion and humour without political subversion (which, later becomes a distinction between humour as seriously subversive and comedy as trivial and escapist) may stem from wit's early subversion of Puritan standards of decorum. Early wit allowed for laughter, which itself was subversive. However, the stress on educational prestige, class, and the reduction of folk humour to empty crudeness preserves class divisions.

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[147] Freud believes people in the past were more openly (physically) violent and sexual with one another, but Freud never specifies a specific time. Freud assumes "higher civilization" influences "the development of repressions" (696). However, this assumption is problematic. If Freud is referring to tribal cultures, then Freud overlooks evidence that tribal cultures are not necessarily openly violent and sexual with one another. Perhaps Freud has the stereotype of a "savage" or the stereotype of the club-wielding prehistoric human in mind. Despite the popular caricature of the libidinal cave person, it is possible that prehistoric humans were not necessarily much more openly violent and sexual with one another than people today.

For J. C. Gregory, the original meaning and power of wit has been lost, but the meaning is valuable. In *The Nature of Laughter*, Gregory identifies wit as "a double achievement of insight and expression", whose value lies in the "suddenness and vividness of its revelation" (125).[148] More than a specific and static definition, wit is a cultural phenomena punctuated by key historical moments. Referring to Hobbes, Gregory explains that in its cultural manifestation, desire plays an important role in the cultivation of wit: "Desire for power stimulates wit which varies as the source of power is sought in riches, knowledge, or honour" (132). Hence, it would be inappropriate to exclusively dissociate wit from an emotional yearning. Gregory further explains Hobbes in the following manner:

> Wit, Hobbes apparently thinks, can touch the sense of power by inciting laughter of self-applause and it can procure laughter with a sense of the ludicrous. Wit, on Hobbes' version, is quick, nimble, perceptive, and inventive power that tends to be volatile and to pounce on resemblances. It also serves the sense of the ludicrous by begetting jests. (132)

The desire for power may be expressed in intellectual terms, but it is not always a sensible or ethical desire. Political manoeuvring and other such tactics may seem to be steeped in logical strategy, but they often involve an underemphasized emotional element, one of which is the motivation for greater power and control. Pursuing rhetorical education for an image of prestige, downplaying the value of folk humour, and applauding high class wit are all biased affairs, lacking objectivity, fairness, and other such silly uses of logic.[149] Wit is social; wit is a feat of intellect and ludicrous play stressing the incongruity of ideas; wit is also an emotional triumph over a lesser target, which may or may not be deserving of the attack. Owing to the blurriness of comical phenomena, wit is more than simply an intellectual feat. Emotion, class, playfulness, and ridicule fuel wit. Because of the variable history surrounding wit, when one speaks of wit, one needs to qualify or explicitly define his or her usage of the term.

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[148] Gregory's definition is an important one that can serve to describe some comical moments today. Based upon his definition, wit would be especially possible in an environment of improvisation.[148] Ad-libbing, improvisation, and other moments of impromptu humour are a part of comic art today, but they are not limited to verbal funniness or high comic art.

If wit was born in part because of social division between folk culture and high culture, then contemporary popular culture complicates wit. There are class divisions and division between high art and low art; however, popular culture blurs matters. Referring to Pierre Bourdieu's distinction, in *Understanding Popular Culture*, John Fiske says:

> The difficulty or complexity of "high" art is used first to establish its aesthetic superiority to "low," or obvious, art, and then to naturalize the superior taste and (quality) of those (the educated bourgeoisie) whose tastes it meets. A critical industry has been developed around it to highlight, if not actually create, its complexity and thus to draw masked but satisfying distinctions between those who can appreciate it and those who cannot. Artistic complexity is a class distinction: difficulty is a cultural turnstyle-it admits only those with the right tickets and excludes the masses. (121)

In some ways, popular culture has replaced low culture, existing in opposition to high culture. In this sense, popular texts are crude, without artistic merit, and geared towards the lowest common denominator of mindless sheep, as opposed to the great sophisticated minds and distinguishing tastes of the cultured elite. While such a stereotype exists, popular culture permeates class boundaries. In *Textual Poachers*, Henry Jenkins challenges the stereotype of the passive consumer, by presenting ethnographic evidence of fans as active producers of not only meaning, but also of actual creative work inspired by their favourite television programs.[150] In addition, high and low culture meet in cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare, Homer, and Jane Austen. With the academic establishment of popular culture studies, popular culture is not restricted to the uneducated masses. Rather, the elite may also enjoy some beer and football. Conversely, from time to time, the lower classes may appreciate Vivaldi to monster truck rallies. With a public education system, specialty television channels, and the Internet, there has been a greater democratization of high culture, where it can reach those previously shut out.[151] Popular culture bridges the high and low gap, qualifying the status and role of wit.

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[149] In terms of rational insight communicated through wit, in *The Nature of Laughter*, Gregory points out Coleridge's distinction between wit, as scientific wit or simply wit: "The detection of "identity in dissimilar things", which is steadily assigned as the province of wit, divides into "scientific wit", whose object, "consciously entertained, is truth", and wit, whose object is "amusement"" (132).

Along with the general impact of popular culture, stand up comedians further complicate wit. George Carlin makes insightful, witty observations about language, but he uses profanity and behaves in a manner considered impolite by Castiglione. George Carlin is at once low and high. Although there are important differences between these comedians, the mix of low and high can be applied to many, such as Woody Allen, Bill Cosby, Steve Martin, Richard Pryor, Chris Rock, Robin Williams, and so on. The very venue of stand up comedy, a bar or club, is low, but what is being said on stage is not always without wit, social insight, or complex intellectual and artistic value.[152]

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[150] For Jenkins, "Organized fandom is, perhaps first and foremost, an institution of theory and criticism, a semistructured space where competing interpretations and evaluations of common texts are proposed, debated, and negotiated and where readers speculate about the nature of the mass media and their own relationship to it" (86).

[151] Public education introduces students to rhetorical skills, classical drama, and other fields limited to the elite when wit first arose as a potent cultural concept. The Discovery Channel, the History Channel, and other educational channels further deliver information to a wide variety of classes. The Internet offers numerous sites where formal or informal students may directly access the world's classics in literature, philosophy, music, and art.

[152] Further complicating the high and low status of the stand up comedian, the witty comments of comedians often make their way into humour lists circulated throughout the Internet. Jokes and witty lines

The humour and wit distinction may be valuable today in order to distinguish between laughing at a spectacle and laughing at something involving greater complexity, but the distinction requires qualification.[153] Even though comedy of character may utilize stock characters and stock devices, character comedy requires artistry. In parallel, even if wit is more valuable for its artistry, as a linguistic technique, witty comments, dialogue, or monologues have traceable stock techniques. Comic artists may not always consciously utilize such techniques, but, comparable to character comedy, there are stock devices in the creation of high comic art, such as wit, irony, and satire. Smith moves towards identifying the craft and art of wit and humour; in addition, Smith helps identify the ludicrous element of wit. However, subsequent scholars, such as Freud, downplay art, in favour of psychic repression or libidinal hostility. As a result, traditional superiority theory's notion of ridicule resurfaces over Smith's element of play. Popular culture complicates the low and high distinction that was a strong part of the original humour and wit distinction. As it applies to comic nescience, wit can be recuperated as a concept referring to skilful comic insight and playful as well as hostile art, but wit need not differentiate between class, or signal greater political subversiveness, or greater originality, than other funny works.

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created by certain comedians often appear anonymous, taking on a cultural circulation without acknowledgment of the artistic source.

[153] By spectacle, I mean something amusing on its own, a visual gag, such as a ridiculous costume.

> Life's a laugh, and death's the joke, it's true.
> You see, it's all a show, keep them laughing as you go.
> Just remember, the last laugh is on you.
> Eric Idle, "Always Look on the Bright Side of Life," *Life of Brian*

III. A Range of Dynamic Tensions

Like life and death, with the comical, it seems as though one element cannot exist without another, often oppositional, element. The major theories have approached comical categories and engaged in debates that pivot around opposing ideas. As has just been observed, commentators (Smith, Gregory, Bergson, Freud) on wit stress the intellectual value of idea comedy, while associating comedy of character with the body. In a related fashion, for Plato, the comical is un-self-knowing; yet, some funny texts, especially parody and irony are closely associated with textual self-reflexivity, which signals a meta-awareness for author and audience. Even when not parodic, if comedy of character is teaching audiences how to re-balance their humours, then such funniness must be aware of something more than hostile mockery. Bergson stresses the logical, intellectual side of laughter, but funniness is not always or exclusively logical. In some instances, the major theories have acknowledged the blurriness of overlapping ideas. As an alternative to debate between opposing ideas or separating overlapping elements, because of the persistence of opposing and overlapping elements, it may be suitable, from the perspective of comic nescience, to explicitly articulate an active tension between logic and non-logic, intellect and emotion, and the *alazôn* and *eirôn*.

Logic has a somewhat inconsistent, but important place in the understanding of comical phenomena. The inconsistency stems from a class bias and from lack of uniformity or specificity in the characteristics of key categories. Previous sections already discussed class bias and inconsistent terms. Nevertheless, regarding unclear terminology, consider how, in *An Essay on Comedy*, George Meredith declares: "Comedy is the fountain of sound sense" (22). Since he uses the term comedy in the general sense, one can interpret Meredith as referring to low and high comedy, or comedy of character and comedy of idea.[154] However, Meredith aims to solidify the artistry of Molière, arguing, "Menander and Molière stand alone specially as comic poets of the feelings and the idea" (46). For Meredith, Molière's value stems from rational insight: "The source of his wit is clear reason: it is a fountain of that soil; and it springs to vindicate reason, common-sense, rightness and justice" (28). Here is the important place of logic in comical texts: the sense behind the nonsense may have a curative effect upon the audience. Perhaps Meredith's characterization of Molière as bringer of reason and good sense stems from Molière's own defence of *Tartuffe* from 1669. According to *The Development of Comic Theory*, Haberland explains Molière's preface to *Tartuffe*: Molière justifies his play "on the grounds that such comic writing will rid society of its petty vices, and he thus attempts to ward off his enemies who attack him and his plays as immoral" (35). Haberland, however, does not believe Molière:

> It is highly doubtful that Molière wrote his comedies in the belief that through manipulation and direction of our ridicule he could instruct us. A playwright possessing such wisdom and human understanding, as Molière surely did, would not expect one impostor in his audience to rid himself of hypocrisy or one miser to see the error of his ways and donate his gold-filled purse to charity. Molière, himself a comic actor, wrote his comedies primarily in order to entertain and amuse the members of the audience. Molière is both laughing at and laughing with, with the major emphasis on the latter. (35)

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[154] As indicated earlier, in *The Nature of Laughter*, J. C. Gregory claims wit has degenerated in meaning over time (127). Hence, there is a lack of consistency with key terms, such as wit.

Perhaps a part of Molière believed in the transformative powers of laughter. Considering how not only Molière but also many comic writers are associated with reason and social reality, it is possible that Molière did not naïvely believe that his work will correct the ills of his audience. Although his emphasis is otherwise in *An Essay on Comedy*, even Meredith admits: "to love Comedy you must know the real world, and know men and women well enough not to expect too much of them, though you may still hope for good" (40). Based upon the lack of change in human civilization over the past two thousand years or so, it would be illogical to assume that the logic behind a comical text will miraculously alter human society for the better.[155] Nevertheless, it would be irresponsible to not try to persuade humans to improve their attitudes and behaviour. At the very least, comical insight should not harm human beings any further than they are capable of doing so themselves. Perhaps, laughter makes such pain more bearable.

Although the reasoning underlying a comical text or comical moments within text has been generally identified as "logic" or reason, a more appropriate term is argument.[156] In relation to serious persuasion, the use of the term "logic" in describing comical works requires careful qualification. For instance, a list of logical fallacies in the mouth of a comic character may arouse humour. Because they laugh at the fallacious reasoning, audiences are reminded how not to use logic. However, in comical texts, the use of logical fallacies is deliberate and intended to arouse laughter. In a context of serious persuasion, logical fallacies may be more easily recognized as mistakes, but not necessarily laughable ones. Moreover, speakers, politicians, and policy makers may deliberately utilize logical fallacies, because even if flawed, they can be highly persuasive. On that note, a comedian's "logic" (behind his or her comical text) employs a variety of rhetorical devices, including a mix of sound logical reasoning and illogical appeals. Just as satire may lend logically sound insight into poverty, satire may also illogically support racism, sexism, and even war.[157] Some texts may have an underlying argument, but that argument may or may not be logically sound. While insights into logic and comical communication are valuable, Meredith, Bergson, and others may find an alternative term, argument, more suitable.

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[155] A lack of change in terms of human failings, mistreatment of one another, hypocrisy, and so on.

[156] To remind the reader of the association between rational thinking and comedy, for Cicero, Quintilian, and others, humour is a useful persuasive device. As mentioned earlier, in *Laughter*, Bergson says "the comic spirit has a logic of its own" (http://www.authorama.com/laughter-1.html). In *An Essay on Comedy*, Meredith says comedy is based on "sound sense" (22).

From the perspective of comic nescience, it is possible to stress the tension between opposing forces, as opposed to one force over another. Although comic texts may utilize logic, they also make appeals beyond the scope of reason. In romantic comedies, the plot often pivots around love, which is not necessarily the most logical of concepts. The logic fuelling a satire may also be something close to love; the love of your fellow human beings may motivate one to speak out in anger against the impoverished. Believing in the need for change, but grounded by the difficulty of changing people's attitudes, the satirist is appropriately cynical. Swift's "A Modest Proposal" demonstrates a love for human life, but a cynicism that rages through a vicious proposal delivered by the charming rhetoric of one source of the problem, self-serving politicians. The use of logical fallacies or nonsense to support a logical argument points to an active tension between the illogical and the logical that is further realized in the combination of delivering hope, but critically interrogating social reality. A strict comedy may end in hopeful harmony, but it may also ridicule the ills of the day. As should be apparent, rather than one element over another, comic nescience offers an alternative perspective, which recognizes an active tension between love and hate, the playfully ludicrous and the dangerously ridiculous, nonsense and sense, and so on.

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[157] For instance, D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation*, although not a satire, has moments of satire, which depict African-Americans as lazy, irresponsible, and corrupt. These moments are satirical, because they embody a mix of harsh comic ridicule in the service of a didactic argument. In this film, the problem with America is that African-Americans are polluting the purity of white America, with both their skin and their lack of morals, causing the fall of America as a great, pure nation. Giving new meaning to the use of black humour, Griffith's moments of satirical argument are based upon several logical fallacies, fabricated evidence, and racist propaganda. Beyond his ridicule, Griffith does have a sound logical argument.

Consider the complicated function of nonsensical language. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye reveals a tension between grammar and logic: "Logic may have grown out of grammar, but to grow out of something is in part to outgrow it. For grammar may also be a hampering force in the development of logic, and a major source of logical confusions and pseudo-problems (332). Gracie Allen made a career out of playing the seemingly dimwitted nonsensical woman. On the *Burns and Allen* show, her nonsensical language served a dualistic, oppositional purpose. On the one hand, her misuse of language makes her a comic target. On the other hand, her nonsensical language exposes the dynamics of and thus playfully challenges normative discourse.[158] Rather than being exclusively figured as a comic target or as a witty fool, Gracie is both; thus, she embodies a dynamic comic tension. In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye claims: "Grammar and logic both seem to develop through internal conflict" (333). For Frye, linguistic conflict is an important part of mental training; Frye says, "if we do not know another language, we have missed the best and simplest opportunity of getting our ideas disentangled from the swaddling clothes of their native syntax" (333). Gracie's nonsense is another language, a comical one that exposes the gap between grammar and logic, as well as intended discourse and misunderstood discourse. Frye believes: "logic cannot develop properly without dialectic, the principle of opposition in thought" (333). Extending Frye, the logic underlying comical communication exists in a complicated opposition to illogical communication, attitudes, or behaviour. Rather than claiming the comical is an either-or phenomenon (logical or illogical, intellectual or emotional), comic nescience views the comical as an active tension between forces.

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[158] Her subversive role is manifested by moments of misunderstanding in the series when her nonsensical logic unravels the logic of authority (usually patriarchal) figures.

In terms of characterization, a dynamic tension between differing forces exists in the *alazôn* and *eirôn* relationship. In *The Art of Comedy Writing*, Arthur Asa Berger defines an *alazôn* as a boaster: "He lacks self-understanding and doesn't realize that everyone thinks of him as a fool. He is also a gull – who is naïve and easily persuaded, two common characteristics of fools" (48). For Berger, an *eirôn* is a pretender:

> These characters trick other characters to obtain some goal: money, freedom, a loved one or a lusted-after one, etc. A great deal of comedy involves characters who are dissemblers, pretending something (men pretending they are women, women pretending they are men, kings pretending they are commoners, servants pretending they are helping their masters, and so on). Wily servants are often eirons. (48)

For Berger's purposes, the distinction is rather clear: an *alazôn* is truly a fool, posing as someone greater than he or she is, while an *eirôn* is truly wise, posing as someone lesser than he or she is. However valuable such a distinction is, some comedic characters may exhibit qualities that make them at once an *alazôn* and an *eirôn*, or something in between. In *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*, Lane Cooper cites Cornford's observation: "The Buffoon and the Eiron are more closely allied in Aristotle's view than a modern reader might expect" (263). With comic nescience's interest in overlapping qualities, it is beneficial to briefly look into the *alazôn* and *eirôn*.

In a sense, both the *alazôn* and *eirôn* pretend, because they believe fooling or manipulating others is beneficial in a self-serving manner. Pretending is a basic and reliable technique that instantly creates comic irony for the audience. When the audience knows the *alazôn* is really a dolt, but the *alazôn* is trying to convince others of his prowess, or when the audience sees that the *eirôn* is effectively tricking some dimwitted authority figure, then the audience enjoys the comical fun. From a privileged vantage point, audiences know more than the *alazôn* or know more than the victims of the *eirôn*, and thus are in on the fun. As defined by Berger, the *alazôn* and *eirôn* have control over their behaviour, but differ in terms of their self-knowledge or the knowledge of a situation. The *alazôn* is in control of his boasting and because he is in control of a behaviour that is at odds with his actual ability or situation, the *alazôn* is laughable. The *eirôn* has a control suitable for his ability and situation, which leads to his or her success. Of the two, the *eirôn* is the more capable and more powerful. However, two ancient examples and two contemporary characters complicate both the agency of the *eirôn* and the clear distinction between *alazôn* and *eirôn*.

To a certain degree, Socrates and Odysseus are *eirôn* figures. In *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*, Lane Cooper says: “the great example of the 'ironical man' is the Socrates of Plato, with his customary affectation of ignorance” (263). Socrates is a wily trickster, who feigns ignorance to trap his opponents, revealing their flawed arguments. Socrates is an intelligent and capable individual, who does exhibit a trickster’s agency, until he decides to order a drink. Despite his reputation as a wily genius, Socrates was not too wise when it came to his choice of beverage. Although Socrates and his hemlock episode is a historical event outside the parameters of his literary persona, his death is nonetheless a key, and possibly problematic, part of his image. For all his trickery and agency, Socrates could not "wittle" his way out of a very important situation.[159] The master orator Odysseus is another major figure known for his wit-trickery, because as many episodes in his journey indicate, he thwarts his enemies through cunning. For instance, Odysseus escapes Polyphemus through ingenuity, blinding him and then escaping, while making Polyphemus foolishly – and humorously – shout that nobody blinded him. However, for all his wit, Odysseus has difficulty reading a map, because it took him a long time to reach home. In fact, as soon as the *eirôn* sails from Polyphemus, Odysseus boastfully reveals his name, foolishly causing him to bear the wrath of Poseidon. In this way, Odysseus is more than just an *eirôn*; quite literally, at times, he is also a boaster, or *alazôn*. While they may exhibit cunning and agency at defining moments, Socrates is not always effective and Odysseus foolishly boasts.[160]

The *eirôn* finds its variation within American popular culture as the confidence trickster. A newspaper term, "confidence man" first emerged in 1849 to describe the exploits of William Thompson who would swindle trusting individuals.[161] Herman Melville's *The Confidence-Man* from 1857 further popularizes the term, which circulates as "con-man," or, more recently, confidence trickster. Being a dishonest individual out for personal gain, the Hollywood confidence trickster is at odds with the Alger's vision of success. In *Wedding Crashers*, John Beckwith (Owen Wilson) and Jeremy Grey (Vince Vaughn) are successful tricksters for the first part of the film. Posing as friends or family, they sneak into weddings for free food and to sleep with desperate single women. Soon, love foils their cunning strategy; each of the pair falls for their latest marks. As a result, they shift from fun-loving tricksters to manipulative boasters. The resemblance to the un-self-aware *alazôn* is most apparent when a desperate Beckwith meets with the greatest wedding crasher of all time, the role model Chazz Reinhold (Will Ferrell). Reinhold is sleazy, who (because they have even more desperate women than weddings do) has turned to crashing funerals. Although Reinhold considers himself a trickster, Beckwith finally sees Reinhold and himself as foolish. As with Socrates and Odysseus, Beckwith and Grey complicate the clear division between *alazôn* and *eirôn*. The lack of clear distinction between *alazôn* and *eirôn* may be especially applicable to works consisting of comic characters portrayed in some depth or with some contradictions.[162]

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[159] "Wittle" is an example of the word-formation technique using the terms wit and whittle, or "wit-tle," which is but a little tribute to Socrates, the wit, and, clearly, a repressed unconscious, possibly hostile, reference to Freud. Freud's fascination with joining words through the phallic bond of a dash is a sexual union that threatens Lacan's Law of the Father. This reading is based upon the learned philosopher Platototle's metaphysical conception of the unity of word love forms.

[160] Extending these examples of the limits of the *eirôn*, the comedian, in general, is not in total control of his or her product. To the wrong audience or to those easily offended, humour easily turns into an attack on the comedian or comical text. The audience plays a crucial role in appreciating, condemning, or otherwise judging the comedian and his or her comedy.

[161] In *Satirical Apocalypse*, Jonathan A. Cook says: "The respectable-looking "William Thompson" engaged a stranger in conversation, requested his "confidence" in connection with the temporary "loan" of his watch (the "mark" assumed some previous acquaintance), and then exited the scene with both confidence and chronometer" (1).

Along with the general dynamic of being understood/misunderstood, there are other opposing forces warranting comic nescience's stress on an active dynamic. While scholars may view texts as logical or non-logical, intellectual or emotional, and while characters may be either buffoons or tricksters, comic nescience shifts the focus towards a dynamic tension between forces. Directly or indirectly, one force cannot exist without the other, so rather than describing comical phenomena in one way or the other, some comical works can be viewed for the relationship between complementary forces.

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[162] In addition, as with Quixote, a comic character may become complex if audiences embrace him or her.

You grow up the day you have your
first real laugh at yourself
Ethel Barrymore[163]

IV. Questioning Superiority's Intelligence

The tendency towards knowledge, orientation, and intelligence in comic theory relates to superiority theory's persuasiveness. Benefiting from a glimpse into anagnôrisis, joke structure is a key area of opposing tensions. In *Recognitions*, Terence Cave explains:

> In Aristotle's definition, anagnorisis brings about a shift from ignorance to knowledge; it is the moment at which the characters understand their predicament fully for the first time, the moment that resolves a sequence of unexplained and often implausible occurrences; it makes the world (and the text) intelligible. (1)

Basic joke structure bears a parallel relationship to Cave's explanation.[164] The set-up leads the listener along one line of thinking, but a surprise twist thwarts the expected meaning, altering the meaning of the entire text. For superiority theorists, the incongruity-resolution element in jokes ultimately leads to feelings of superiority, because it places the teller and listener into positions of knowledge. The sense of the set-up is thwarted by a nonsensical, disorienting twist, but upon understanding the twist, one is re-oriented into a position of sense and knowing.

In the basic sense, from the superiority perspective, comic material consists of a teller, listener, and target or butt. Primarily, because they laugh at the (usually demeaned) target, the teller and listener affirm their superiority to the butt. Secondarily, in-group feeling is promoted between the teller and listener, effectively ostracizing the butt in a binary and hierarchical manner. Taking matters further, in a reflection concerning the importance of both superiority theory and incongruity theory, Vandaele argues that jokes confirm superior intelligence and ultimately make sense. In "Humor Mechanisms," while acknowledging the element of incongruity in comic material, Vandaele claims that jokes lead to a problem-solving element that is ultimately a confirmation of superiority. Vandaele declares: "Jokes often present incongruities that still need to be "explained" in one way or another; understanding them demands an effort, and any failure of perception is easily noticed and increases the implicit social pressure. Understanding a joke leads to superiority feelings" (225).[165] In *The Comic Inquisition*, John Hind explains a similar perspective by merging superiority with incongruity:

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[163] From page 142 of Karyn Ruth White's and Jay Arthur's *Your Seventh Sense*.

[164] From the perspective of comic nescience, Cave's *Recognitions* is valuable in terms of how it stresses the relationship between plot structure and recognition, a shift from ignorance to knowledge. Speaking of metaphora and referring to Aristotle, Cave declares: "*Metaphora* is a linguistic mode of disguise or temporary deception leading to the revelation (recognition?) of likeness amid difference; or again, according to Aristotle's analysis of jokes in the *Rhetoric*, the complex plot could be regarded as having the form of an extended joke" (49).

> 'Ha-ha' sounds remarkably like 'A-ha!', which is either the sound of surprise or realisation, *or* a statement of one's superiority. Comedy involves versatility and play with codes, conventions and meanings. It challenges, or at least tests, categories. It exercises a concept's hinges so as to speak; or rather it throws an idea up in the air for at least a moment. Good jokes begin by offering an expectation but shifting from it. There is surprise and then release, and thus coherence. Contradictions exist in humour and they are resolved through laughter. There is a palpable tension in humour, as there is in the synapse that exists between comedian and audience; there is a push and pull between recognition of the familiar and the *possibility* of the casting

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[165] Although Vandaele refers to it as incongruity theory, Vandaele more specifically adopts an incongruity-resolution theory, where solving the incongruity is stressed over the moment of incongruity itself. Also, Vandaele stress on resolution makes Sperber and Wilson relevant. In "Funny Fiction," Christina Larkin Galiñanes presents Sperber and Wilson in identifying a link between incongruity-resolution and the theory of relevance. The act of attempting to resolve incongruity (the middle area between the moment of surprise and the eventual resolution of incongruity) is termed by Sperber and Wilson as a "search for relevance" (84).

> aside of convention, of authority. The message seems to be: 'RESIST NORMALITY'. xiii

Despite its emphasis on superiority, Hind's explanation points to a potentially subversive element; if contradictions are to be noticed and reality is to be resisted, then appreciating a joke does not necessarily mean that one is being a social conformist. Hind possibly overstates the rebellious element, but his pairing of feelings of superiority and resisting authority are telling about the contradictory qualities of humour. The level of subversiveness or lack of subversiveness depends less upon a quality of humour in general, than it does upon an individual joke, the individual players, the socio-political context, and other real-world variables.

Superiority theory's three basic elements are assumptions about the teller, listener, and target. Firstly, superiority theory assumes that the target being laughed at is lesser than the listener and teller. For instance, a French cabby and a French philosopher laugh at and theorize, a darker-skinned target. Secondly, superiority theory assumes the in-group feeling supported is normative. Both the cabby and philosopher are white, a part of a dominant group in France, laughing at someone who does not fit in. Thirdly, because the cabby and philosopher affirm their "logic," of considering darker skin a disguise over light skin, they make pseudo-logical sense. While this may be valid in many instances, superiority theory may also work in another manner.

One, the target could be socially higher, but, value wise, lesser than the listener and teller. The target can be an authority figure or peers, demeaned in some manner specific to the value of a subculture. High school dropouts can laugh at the students who go to school regularly, because the dropouts value another type of life, one that they realize is not respectable in the normative sense. In other words, the low and high positioning of superiority needs qualification. Two, in addition to self-deprecating humour, which was mentioned earlier, some jokes can help one cope with difficulty. For instance, rather than a battle between teller and target, jokes about poverty by the impoverished can be a coping mechanism. Three, in-group approval is not the only determining factor of a joke's quality. At one time, racist humour may have been normative, but now such humour is less acceptable. However, such humour still exists and may still be funny, in a technical sense. In other words, even though the social standards have changed, jokes do not entirely rest upon majority social approval or disapproval; a joke may be racist, and thus not arouse laughter, but the racist joke may still be constructed well for a group of comic theorists. Four, the assumption that the knowledge of the teller and listener are affirmed by a joke may not hold up to logical rigour. As illustrated earlier, dark skin is not a disguise. Regardless of how much sense it makes to a cabby and a philosopher, a black man in France is not some white guy who has coloured his skin, hiding in the country for several decades, just so he can participate in riots about French employment laws. Superiority may confirm a pseudo-logical connection between ideas for the teller and listener, but those ideas may lack knowledge. Although in the immediate sense, the listener and teller may affirm their knowledge by understanding a joke, in the wider use of the term knowledge, some jokes may confirm the lack of intelligence in the teller and listener.

According to incongruity-resolution variety of hostility theory, understanding a satirical piece may make one feel superior, because one has seen through the hoax, or understanding a joke may make one feel superior, because one has resolved the incongruity. However, in other ways, superior is too strong a word for a four reasons. Firstly, if the majority of readers understand or are taught to understand "A Modest Proposal" as a critique of ignoring poverty, or if the majority of listeners know why the chicken has crossed the road, then the individual who resolves the incongruity is not superior, but average. The individual integrates into a common social understanding. Secondly, stock jokes also complicate superiority's stress on intelligence. Communities make jokes about one another that may be largely interchangeable in structure.[166] Perhaps with one difficult joke, a listener and teller can feel intelligently superior for having understood a joke, but matters may change once one looks at jokes and joking as a normative, cross-cultural, phenomenon.[167] Specifically, one may realize that the comic target is replaceable; with some types of dumb jokes, the community of the teller or listener can change positions with the target community and the joke is still funny. If one does not realize such an element of jokes, then perhaps superior intelligence is not the best way to describe one's understanding of joking as discourse.[168]

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[166] Consider the following two jokes: A newlywed steps out of the shower, explaining to her husband, "Listen, if I step out of the shower with a towel on my head, that means I am tired and I want to sleep. But, if I step out of the shower and my hair is down, that means I feel good and I feel beautiful, and I'm ready for anything." She winks. The husband nods, and explains, "And if I step out of the shower, with my underwear on, that means I am tired and I want to sleep. But, if I step out of the shower, without my underwear, that means I don't care about what you got on your head." In this first joke, the male exhibits assertive power of the female, who becomes a comic target. However, the joke has a parallel. A newlywed returns home, explaining to his wife, "Listen, if I come home with my hat tilted to the left, that means I had a good day, and I feel great. We can talk, cuddle, and go out for a romantic evening. But, if I come home and my hat is tilted to the right, that means I had a tough day, and I feel upset. I don't want to talk or go out -- all I want is some food and sleep – peace and quiet!" He stomps his foot. The wife nods, "When you come, if you see me on the doorstep waiting for you, then I don't care which direction your hat is in, we're going to talk, cuddle, and you'll take me out for a wonderfully romantic evening." In the second joke, the female subverts the demands of the male, who becomes a comic target.

[167] Appropriately, much laughter stems from "laughing at," notoriously exemplified by racist, sexist, homophobic, or otherwise "mean" humour. In *Ethnic Humor Around the World: A Comparative Analysis*, Christie Davies investigates the common links between various types of jokes around the world that target a specific ethnic, religious, linguistic, or cultural group. Depending upon the type of target (for instance, cunning or stupid), often the jokes are interchangeable; that is, the structure is similar, but the specific target character simply changes.[illegible] While the analysis Davies provides is thorough, it is more qualitative than quantitative, according to Liisa Laineste. In "Targets of Estonian Ethnic Jokes within the Theory of Ethnic Humor," Laineste challenges Davies's claims for a global theory of ethnic humour, by highlighting the quantitative differences in Estonian ethnic humour. While some of Davies's claims apply to Laineste's study, Laineste points believes: "Estonian material includes tendencies and single phenomena which cannot be explained through the theory – for example, why the jokes are told upward, i.e., on the lower social and economical level, and in periphery (in geographical sense) jokes are made on ethnic groups higher up the social scale (eg. Estonians about Russians)" (17). What Laineste points to is the possibility that common qualitative assumptions about humour need to be augmented with not only quantification, but also with the acknowledgment that humour may be more difficult to understand than simply one powerful group demeaning another with less power. The circulation of jokes is not limited to ethnic humour. It seems as though other types of jokes move from one linguistic and cultural sphere. In addition, with the Internet, a

When viewed as forms of social cohesion, the combination of superiority and group affiliation as a means to make one's entire group feel superior to a marginalized target, works more convincingly. However, intelligence and superiority feelings stemming from resolving a joke is an overstatement. Thirdly, if one feels superior because one has resolved incongruity, then it is over an incongruity that has relatively clear and simple parameters. If one script or predicted pattern does not fit, then an alternative script does, an alternative provided by the punch line. It does not take great insight or effort to understand a joke, especially if the answer is provided. The listener has done little, except notice the text in a new manner as prompted by the text itself. When seen in this manner, feelings of triumphant intellectual superiority are exaggerated terms for what is happening when one resolves incongruity or, more properly, has resolution offered to them. The "A-Ha!" of "Ha-Ha!" is not simply a triumphant declaration of one's intellectual prowess. Rather, the overlap of "A-Ha!" insight and "Ha-Ha!" laughter is evident of two things. One, the listener performs a role, playing along with the joke or comic text. The listener's role cannot be overstated, because he or she helps establish the mirth-provoking status of a text. Two, the reader/listener is being

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social tendency for sharing e-mail jokes has emerged, as well as specific subcultures sharing community specific jokes, such as computer specialists sharing computer jokes. In "A Framework for the Study of Computer-Oriented Humor (COHUM), Linda Weiser Friedman and Hershey H. Friedman examine and provide parameters for the "in-humour" of computer specialists (http://64.233.183.104/search?q=cache:qcf7GboZL-cJ:cisnet.baruch.cuny.edu/papers/cis200301.pdf+james+beattie+comic+theory+ludicrous&hl=en).

[168] Jokes as mutable templates for discourse demonstrate how superiority feelings can be aroused in differing groups, mainstream or marginalized.

asked to see beyond a text's communication of content, in order to be aware of form, interpretive role, and at times, larger social or political implications.

In terms of questioning the resolution of incongruity as a mark of superiority, fourthly, superiority is too strong a descriptor, because it stresses resolution over the dynamic of flexible thinking. Superiority theory privileges the end of a joke, rather than the entire process, the larger phenomena of joking, or the varied cultural manifestations of comical texts. When joking and humour in general is seen as a widespread, cross-cultural phenomenon that has a wide range of motives and evokes a wide range of reactions, then humour is much larger and more complicated than affirming one's brilliant ability to understand a punch line.

On this point, an old April Fool's Day folk tale comes to mind. A king with an icy heart rules with dictatorial control over his populace. His controlling behaviour dampens the spirits of his community and a vicious winter inflicts the entire kingdom. Nothing grows and the people grow both saddened and fearful. On April first, his jester plays a practical joke on the king; onlookers fear the jester will be killed, but instead of being angry, the king laughs. When the king laughs, his icy heart melts, and spring blossoms throughout the kingdom. The practical joke reveals that the king cannot control everything and that his controlling behaviour is the root of his kingdom's problem. The king learns to become more accepting of the uncertainty of the world around him, rather than trying to bend everything to fit his desires. In humour, the combination of insight and laughter can point to the type of insight the king gains in April; instead of being a declaration of superiority, resolving incongruity can be a means of relinquishing a sense of control and knowing over the world. The successful confident cognizant agent's desire to control and know the world may be a delusion in itself, a lack of greater awareness that seizes upon an artificial moment of a joke to celebrate his or her desperate sense of superiority. Owing to the complicated quality of joking, feeling some superiority in joking may also be harmless fun, or a healthy means to gain confidence and self-esteem. Comic nescience allows for all such possibilities.

On the level of creative production and cultural bias, as it relates to uncertainty and chance, quality comic writing, performance, or production often demonstrates a high degree of knowledge, agency, and skill by the writer, performer, or artist. However, even if well formulated, because jokes, gags, and bits risk not producing laughter, there is some uncertainty inherent to comic writing, performance, and production.[169] Unlike a classy ballet performance, where audiences may appreciate a skilful jump for its grace and athleticism, rather than being applauded for its comic timing, a skilful pratfall may be dismissed for any number of reasons, but especially for not arousing laughter.[170] Indeed, because of the intersection of cultural attitudes against agency and because of the superiority approach, audiences and critics may dismiss a pratfall as something stupid, instead of something artistic. Building upon Kaufman's concept of the ironic persona in *The Comedian*, artists may be emphasized for their silly persona, resulting in the dismissal of the validity of their socio-political message or the artistry of their delivery. Hence, while characters demonstrate a lack of knowing, comic artistry is nescient, because the desired appreciation via laughter is not always guaranteed. Comic art depends, in large part, upon the acceptance of the audience of readers, listeners, or viewers. The risky delivery of comical art includes a dynamic of artistic agency and elements outside of artistic agency.

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[169] Once again, in a general sense, such a statement can be adapted to apply to other art forms. (A short story may fail to sustain a reader's interest). The claim here is that within the context of comic theory, (where for instance, scholars such as Cooper, Freud, Bergson and others identify the template for comic plays or witty lines) the uncertain element of comic communication has been downplayed.

[170] One notable exception may be Jackie Chan, whose comic action involves dangerous stunt work that, because martial fighting ability and athletic risk are valued, lends some instant appreciation to his comic action, even if audiences of different tastes do not find his work equally funny. Unlike traditional simple slapstick, where a character stumbles and slips, Chan's slapstick often demonstrates both his character's and his own (as a creative performer) prowess and agency. Further complicating matters, when the credits of his films roll, Chan often reveals the film's outtakes, where he fails to successfully perform his stunts; here the performer Chan allows audiences to laugh at and with his actual performative mistakes, at times evoking a shocked response in viewers, when Chan is actually injured. Simultaneously, in many one of his signature films, Chan is the persona of the comic martial artist, the performer who fouls up his sequences, and the human being who draws sympathy for his injuries and respect for his stunt action commitment.

Upon understanding a joke, all of us may not stomp our feet and club our chests in glorious triumph. While it is appropriate to say that the set up and punch line shift may lead to a feeling of intelligence, the experience of having one's expectations thwarted may simultaneously celebrate the humility of unknowing. Comical texts exhibit the dynamic relationship of unknowing and knowing. Like *Wedding Crashers*, other films present narratives where the knowing comic agent learns humility and realizes his or her lack of control and agency or realizes the value of not attempting to control everything.[171] For comic nescience, humour is an explicitly multifaceted phenomenon, which involves the interplay of the intellect, emotion, sense, nonsense, understanding, and misunderstanding, amongst other elements. Rather than emphasizing knowledge or ignorance as static states, comic nescience emphasizes knowing and unknowing as an organic, ever developing, intertwined relationship.

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[171] In *Anger Management*, Dave (Adam Sandler) must learn to be assertive, without being controlling or, like his boss, manipulative. By the film's end, Dave and the audience learn that much of Dave's recent experience was a secret therapy session organized by his girlfriend and doctor. Ultimately, Dave learns to be the butt of a joke and plays a similar joke on his teacher, Buddy (Jack Nicholson). In *Groundhog Day*, the acerbic Phil Conners (Bill Murray) must live the same day over, until he gives up his selfish manipulation and sense of self-importance. By the film's end, Phil has become a valuable member of society, who no longer pursues his selfish desires or uses manipulative tactics. Rather, Phil becomes honest, attempting to better himself, help others, and become genuinely close to his love-interest, Rita (Andie McDowell). In these films, the protagonist learns not to take himself too seriously, reaching a balance of standing up for principles, without becoming self-important or hurting others.

Whenever I hear someone sigh that "Life is hard,"
I'm always tempted to ask, "Compared to what?"
Sydney J. Harris[172]

V. America as Pluralistic Utopian Comedy

V. A. American Pluralism

An awareness of the multiplicity of comic communication may be especially valid in the comedy of American artists, a society which wrestles with the desire to be a unified and homogenous entity, but throughout its history, has to contend with its own pluralism and its commitment to democratic values, freedom of expression, and thus, the right to hold differing perspectives. Since its inception, America has been a society composed of multiple sub-cultures. Originally, the home of various native tribes, America eventually became the home for a variety of European communities and Africans, and then, a home for people from around the world, from different religions, ethnicities, and linguistic groups. Today, the United States is composed of a variety of cultures. Aside from cultural diversity, America has also been the site of diverse ideological voices. Alongside markers that characterize the United States as united and uniform, such as the Declaration of Independence and capitalism, there have been moments of great division (the Civil War, slavery, Vietnam). Appropriately, in *Rebellious Laughter*, Joseph Bodkin says: "Humor in the United States reflects an idiosyncratic array of ethnic and gender groups, social interests, and political concerns" (1). Yet, Bodkin continues, there are "common reference points in the humor that enable people of differing stripes and classes to plug into the scene and to derive meaning from it" (1). In terms of how multiplicity relates to humour within the American context, it is highly possible that some humour functions relatively uniformly, while other comical moments invites a greater interpretive diversity.

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[172] From page 46 of Karyn Ruth White's and Jay Arthur's *Your Seventh Sense*.

V. B. Principles and Practice

The gap between delivering hope, and yet assessing social reality may have a unique function in the American tradition. In his *In Praise of Comedy*, Feibleman points out how comedy navigates the gap between the ideal image and human shortcoming: "Comedy points to what actually happens, as Aristotle said, in the interests of what may happen" (29). The contradictions in many of the examined texts may point to this tension between promoting a principle for the sake of a uniform American vision (hard work and ethics lead to success), but social reality (prejudice, sexism, bias, politics) undermines the ideal. Human vision is not always upheld by human action. The high (the ideal) is brought low (social complications), and in the process, comedy happens. Rather than concluding that comic texts are promoting one element over the other (either principle over practice, or practice over principle), from the perspective of comic nescience, comic texts may vary or they may do both simultaneously.[173]

The ideal versus the practical has particular relevance for the United States, because early in its development, America envisioned itself as an ideal in a very literal sense. This not only helps to create a highly intoxicating image for America, but the combination of identifying a utopia to an actual geographic entity merges the ideal and the real in a manner that may be especially suited for developing a comical tradition that notices the incongruity within such a founding association. In addition, several American values illustrate a tension suitable for comic incongruity. For instance, individualism is at odds with the idea of a nation, especially one that calls itself the United States or promotes a cultural melting pot. In *Success in America*, Rex Burns articulates such tension: "the often strained attempt to unite incipient individualism and social harmony implies the kind of society the Puritans sought: one which was to be stable yet open to change for the individual" (3). Blind justice is at odds with historical genocide against Native Americans; liberty is at odds with the enslavement of African-Americans. If America were a character in a play by Aristophanes, America would promote a proud self-image, but that image would be undercut by shameful actions. Positioning America as an ideal and holding up American ideals next to the shortcomings of human behaviour and action generates humour. Seeing the United States through the lens of comic nescience provides new meaning to "the pursuit of happiness."

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[173] Comedy may present a social problem (a corrupt authority), but also uphold an ideal (a happy end).

American history demonstrates an important tension between the value of rule by the masses and the practice of rule by an elite. For Thomas R. Dye and L. Harmon Zeigler, this tension is *The Irony of Democracy*, whether historically, in terms of public opinion, or practice. Dye and Zeigler declare:

> The Founding Fathers – those fifty-five men who wrote the Constitution of the United States and founded a new nation – were a truly exceptional elite, not only "rich and wellborn" but also educated, talented, and resourceful. When Thomas Jefferson, then the nation's minister in Paris, first saw the list of delegates to the Constitutional Convention of 1787, he wrote to John Adams, the minister to London, "It is really an assembly of demigods." (29)

Dye, Zeigler, and Adams are certainly flattering. Echoing the television demographic research of Morley, who demonstrated that conservative, rather than leftist values, as was assumed, characterize the working classes, Dye and Zeigler claim: "Social science research reveals that most persons are not deeply attached to the causes of liberty, fraternity, or equality . . . Authoritarianism is stronger among the working classes in American than among the middle and upper classes" (17). In *The Comedy of Democracy*, James E. Combs and Dan Nimmo believe the flaw of democracy (rule by an elite) is the reason for its success, because popular opinion is not necessarily democratic:

> the comedy of democracy resides in an ironic incongruity that eternally characterizes popular self-government, always making it less than it could be, bedeviling our hopes for human political fulfillment of the New Man beyond the cursedness of the *Old Adam*. The drama of "rule of the people" plays out over and over again in ignorance of its own comic flaw, the flaw being not so much that democracy doesn't work as that it *never gets tried*. The ultimate irony of democracy is that, as practiced, democracy rests on a flaw: *democracy can only work if it doesn't work, survive and endure only if its principles are violated*. Democracy asks too much of us, so we pass the buck; consequently, as always, the few still rule the many, even in democracies, not by force, but by manipulating and undermining the consent of the governed. (19)

Central to their argument, in *The Irony of Democracy*, Dye and Zeigler claim:

> Democratic values have survived because elites, not masses, govern. Elites in America – leaders in government, industry, education, and civic affairs; the well educated, prestigiously employed, and politically active – give greater support to basic democratic values and "rules of the game" than do the masses. And it is because masses in America respond to the ideas and actions of democratically minded elites that liberal values are preserved. (17)

The Dye and Zeigler conception points to a serious, but as they present it, necessary tension. In terms of upholding democratic values, the prestige and power afforded the elite becomes all the more important. Any corruption, lack of action against injustice, or other such shortcoming becomes extremely dangerous for a society which hopes to be open. As a result, those with the power to shape national values, either through stories of their actions or through expressions of their views, such as heroes or academics, become very important for the comedian. Specifically, the hero or academic who acts for his or her own selfish gain, as opposed to serving as a guardian of democratic principles, embodies the comic tension between ideal and practice.

Within the American tradition, Alger further complicates the existence of an elite. Attaining the American Dream means upward mobility, which implies greater status, and power. The American Dream illustrates a contradiction that can be comical: the American Dream is available equally to all, but attaining success distinguishes one from the masses. The academic makes for a great representative of the American tension between ideal and practice, and between value and attainment. Education is a great equalizer, which allows for people of different socio-economic backgrounds to pursue higher education. However, educational success often manifests itself as a differentiation amongst students that, dangerously, can grow into a self-satisfied and egotistical attitude. The academic, with his or her specific language, security, and power within the ivory walls, may lose touch with the democratic value of equal access, foregoing the pursuit of drawing out the potential of each student's passion. Rather than upholding the ideal of education, promoting democratic access, and protecting the free exchange of ideas and the voicing of differing perspectives, the academic may focus on his or her own self-promotion, or on a biased promotion of colleagues and students preferred for the sake of elitism and power, rather than ability.

V. C. Happily Never After

Identifying the tension between the ideal and practice in this manner means that the comic spirit may be more of a constant than implied by the happy-ending associated with the structure of traditional comedy. In *Reading the Renaissance*, Hart identifies structural fissures:

> in Italian, Spanish, English, and French comedies of the early modern period, the very structure of the plays, the way they end, involves disjunction, stress, and rupture. The ends of comedy represent a return to order, but a restoration with loose ends. They are often asymmetrical and leave doubt in and with the audience. ("The Ends of Renaissance Comedy," (91)

Hart's identification of exceptions that complicate the formal understanding of comedy can be extended even further. Through comic nescience, the happy ending is a voicing of an ideal that need continually re-voicing, to serve as a cultural reminder of not only American ideals, but also to mark a negotiation between an ever-changing society. For instance, the freedom of all men may have first only implied a privileged elite of white men, but over time, the principle opens to include women and slaves. Such negotiation highlights the symbolic value of the ideal ending. As Hart points out in "The Ends," closure, through the impact of Derrida and Foucault, signifies "a kind of ideological containment" (91). However, if one looks at comic texts in a multi-media, trans-historical manner, even the most structurally sound happy-endings do not have to signify closure and thus ideological containment.

From the perspective of comic nescience, the happy-ending is never reached, because it is the pursuit, in "the pursuit of happiness," that requires emphasis. The dynamic tension between ideal and practice continues. Ideals are advanced, but some people, perhaps many people, keep foiling them up.[174] As a result, the end of one comedy is the beginning of another. The ideal is never stable or complete; it cannot be – at least, from the perspective of comic nescience. The pursuit of an ideal is just that, a pursuit that requires a difficult balancing of ideal and practice in the active, unstable sense. Logically, there may always be a gap between perfection and practice in the actual world. As a result, the comic spirit will be continually fuelled by the incongruity of the ideal in tension with the actual.

In popular American film, at least, a type of resolution-oriented traditional comic structure is rather dominant. Action films, the domain of the hero, often involve a pattern that results in a happy- ending. Whereas for ancient Greece, tragedy found a counterpart in comedy, in contemporary Hollywood, two of the most popular modes are action and comedy. Perhaps true to the American self-conception as utopia, both modes (and their hybrid variants) privilege the happy end.[175] However, as demonstrated in an earlier paper, "The Hero is Dead, Long Live the Hero," the heroic figure may reach closure in one film, but is re-invented in another film, by another actor, in another situation, and so on.[176] In American cinema, the utopia faces continual threat, necessitating a restoration of order. In other words, rather than presenting closures of ideological containment, some American cinematic texts can be perceived as elements in a popular ritual that continually offers the pursuit of an ideal, negotiating and re-negotiating American heroes and their more humorous comical counterparts.

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[174] All comedy can be reduced to a gap between ideal and practice, but humans and social life involve contradictory elements that may be stressed as incongruous and directed towards generating laughter.

[175] The comedy versus tragedy binary of ancient Greece may not work with the same force in American cinema. In the tradition of theorizing comedy via a comparison with tragedy, in "The Argument of Comedy," Frye claims, "tragedy is really implicit or uncompleted comedy" and "comedy contains a potential tragedy within itself" (169). In *Anatomy of Criticism*, Frye says: "In fiction, we discovered two main tendencies a "comic" tendency to integrate the hero with his society, and a "tragic" tendency to isolate him" (54). In American cinema, the hero is an interesting combination of outsider (rebel or outlaw) and integrating force (upholding community values, fighting corruption, and restoring order).

[176] This paper was submitted for my third exam to articulate my understanding of the Hollywood conception of the masculine hero. The idea about the impossibility of closure in American narrative finds its origin in that paper, which is included in Appendix One.

Taking the dynamic tension of ideal versus practice and the re-conception of closure, the cure of comical texts is only temporary. The thing about a balance is that it is a tricky state to maintain. Even the best of us will trip in some way. Those who deliberately do so (via corruption and so on) are more troublesome than those who simply slip for some minor difficulty, but a fine balance itself is an active ideal. Moreover, whether homeopathic or allopathic, comic catharsis is a re-balancing that requires frequent treatment. Early notions of comic catharsis also point to this, claiming that humans are likely to build up anger and envy. Freud's psychic thermodynamics also identify a cycle of energy build-up and release. If, as Bergson says, comedy is fundamentally social, then comical texts can be seen as almost organic entities, which regularly handle the social imbalancing and attempt to re-balance of psychic energies of their time. This emphasis on the comical re-balancing leans towards a naïve understanding of human nature and a socially conservative (comic text upholding a social ideal) understanding of humour.

To qualify, matters are not so clear-cut in all instances. In terms of naiveté, if the comic has been trying to re-balance humans for thousands of years, then the comic may feel a bit let down by human behaviour and comical medicine. In *The Unabridged Devil's Dictionary*, speaking of Ambrose Bierce, Schultz and Joshi say, "Bierce recognized that the religion or moral code claimed in some form or another by virtually the entire Western world for nineteen hundred years had not much improved human behavior" (xi-xii). In part, the comic's task is somewhat Sisyphean.[177] A difference from Sisyphus is that the comic may be having some fun performing his or her task.[178] In terms of not being clear-cut, five qualifications are necessary. Firstly, not all comic texts are equally interested in correction. Secondly, comedians may not set out to deliberately or consciously correct anything; there is observational humour, nonsense humour, and anecdotes that are not necessarily interested in advancing an argument or offering instruction –except, perhaps, to say that it is healthy to laugh. Thirdly, comic texts find different targets to correct; so, in the more specific sense of conservative or liberal, the politics of humour may be right-wing, left-wing, or something in-between. Fourthly, various comic texts have varying cultural impact. Audiences may laugh with and forget some comical texts, while other texts and performances may resonate more thoroughly. Fifthly, a comical text has at least two major ways to relate to the elite. On the one hand, a comic may attack the elite in a dangerously subversive manner, to expose corruption and uphold an ideal that is not fulfilled. On the other hand, a comic may play a comic reversal or tease the elite, to ensure the elite's ego does not get too large, or to play a comic reversal, which has two effects. One, the reversal may present the elite as the opposite of what they are, creatively affirming the goodness of the elite. Two, teasing the elite may illustrate how flexibly and down-to-the-earth the elite are, capable of taking a joke (and gentle criticism disguised as cathartic aggression) without feeling offended or threatened. The lack of being offended affirms their ability to be positioned as trustworthy, where the elite are secure enough to hold power objectively, without risking use of that power for their own gain (such as revenge against an offensive joke).

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[177] Sisyphus was a figure from ancient Greece who was punished to continually push a boulder up a mountain. To add insult to injury, his nickname was "Sissy."

[178] Will Kaufman's "irony fatigue" concept may disagree with the notion that comics have fun, at least for their entire careers. With the risk associated with comic production and reception, comedy is not all fun and – play theory – games.

In summary of this subsection, re-conceiving the traditional comedy's happy-end within the dynamic of a continual social tension between varying forces allows for not only a link between contemporary comedy and ancient works, but also challenges the notion of closure (as ideological containment) within American culture. If America itself is conceived as a happy end, of sorts, then comedic narratives may uphold certain principles or critically assess the failure to live up to such principles, while negotiating and re-negotiating the implications of American values, in this case, especially the Alger dream of success.

Conclusion to Comic Nescience

Overall, comic nescience is interested in qualifying the theory of humour through analyses highlighting the way some comical texts exhibit uncertainty, ambiguity, and multiplicity. Comic nescience moves beyond exclusivity in theory and categorization, handles the distinction between wit and humour due to the arrival of popular culture, thinks beyond the division between comical forces, questions the language of superiority theory, and locates Anglo-American texts within a vision of America as a pluralistic democracy utopia "in progress." America is seen as a work "in progress," in order to acknowledge the dynamic social interaction and context inherent to comical texts.

Chapter V: The Western Mythos of Success

> "Let us be thankful for the fools. But for them the rest of us could not succeed."
> (Mark Twain, *Insights Into Literature*, 305)

Introduction to The Western Mythos of Success

Mark Twain's comments are particularly suitable for four reasons. One, the popular western cultural bias regarding individual success implies a hierarchy of those who are more capable and thus better than others are. Predominantly, in this analysis, success applies to material wealth and social prestige, as opposed to success in more private realms (such as interpersonal relationships, family), with more individual characteristics (calmness of mind, positive attitude), and with charitable values (being helpful and caring to others).[179] Two, although there are elements of play and incongruity in his two sentences, the content is a suitable reminder of the western theoretical emphasis, and perhaps explicitly social and emotional emphasis, on superiority/hostility towards a lesser mass of people. Three, the two lines imply that the fools do not include the times when the "us" have been foolish; if the successful admit their own foolishness, they risk collapsing the binary hierarchy between cognizant agent and incapable fool; the successful individual and the foolish loser become one entity, rather than necessarily differentiated classes of people. For instance, admitting a lack of knowledge and agency threatens to tarnish the successful individual's social and cultural prestige. Four, because Twain says "us," then everyone reading the text can take themselves as included, which may point out that the "them" (and the "us") are imagined concepts, as opposed to an actual, uniform, homogenous, and easily identifiable entities. However, owing to the uncertain or nescient quality of joking, other viable interpretations are available. The "us" and "them" can also be taken as less inclusive and more derogatory, if one takes the position of the unsuccessful. Then, Twain's comments are an example of the way those with success or status brag about their position by ridiculing those beneath them. Even then, however, the interpretation need not be so clear, because Twain's quip can also be taken in an ironic fashion; thus, his words would be more sympathetic towards the "losers," and indirectly critical of the binary hierarchy that "laughing at the fools" sustains. The layered multiplicity that leads to differing but simultaneous interpretations illustrates the ambiguity that marks this joke's comic nescience. While the layers may be easily overlooked as simply another ridiculing joke, it is less difficult to overlook the dynamics that contribute to the continued maintenance of a hierarchical binary, between the successful and, in Twain's words, the fools.

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[179] The value placed upon financial success, newspapers and magazines is evident in the significant sections on business events, stock prices, and financial hints. Typically, people are rewarded in their professional lives by attaining positions higher up a hierarchy, greater pay, more job security, and so on. Simultaneously, there are other notions of success. There are a great many magazines and self-help books that promise to make people better in their private lives. (At times, the public and private spheres may even converge, as has been the case historically, with Puritanical beliefs and racism). Personal balance is not totally de-valued by North American culture. However, the stress in this analysis will be on the traditional pursuit of material and social success and its associated power and prestige.

The following exploration of the comic interrogation of the American conception of success, with relevant examples from literature, film, and broadcast media, illustrates how success, marked by a hierarchical relationship between the successful and the foolish, has been traditionally positioned and questioned as an instance of causal agency.[180] The more nescient (uncertain or ambiguous) elements of success and failure are downplayed (in the popular imagination) to uphold the culturally imagined concepts of the cognizant (knowing) agent and to sustain the notion of the unwilling (or slothful) and ignorant fool. If the texts examined are noted for their overlapping meanings, via the lens of comic nescience, then there is evidence of a conception of success in the Anglo-American tradition that complicates the causal equation of success and failure upheld by the popular Alger myth. At least three main factors [the language of triumph, the Horatio Alger myth (including Puritan beliefs and Calvinism), and racism (including Imperialism and Social Darwinism)] influence the western mythos of the successful and the unsuccessful, and the corresponding comical complication of the mythos.

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[180] In *The American Dream*, Jim Cullen says James Truslow Adams may have coined the phrase in *The Epic of America*, explaining how "The American Dream" was not chosen as the title of his book: "it seems odd that Adams was talked out of his wish to call his most popular book *The American Dream*. While it's not clear whether he actually coined the term or appropriated it from someone else, his publisher's reluctance to use it suggests "American Dream" was not in widespread use elsewhere. In any event, Adams invoked it over thirty times in *The Epic of America*, and the phrase rapidly entered common

> You go down there looking for justice, that's what you find, just us.[181]
> (Richard Pryor, "Just Us," *Is It Something I Said?*)

I. Winners and Losers: The Exclusivity of Language

North American ideology commonly identifies success in terms of financial power; however, what is not typically emphasized is the historical fact that success and power often come at the unfortunate expense of or the misfortune of others.[182] With limited financial resources to compete for, success for one implies failure for another. Fittingly, the traditional language of success implies the control and agency of the victor.

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parlance as a byword for what he thought his country was all about, not only in the United States but in the rest of the world" (4).

[181] Although this joke is identifiable as Pryor's, Paul Mooney wrote it. Mooney never gained the success that Pryor did, but serving as a writer for Pryor, some of Mooney's material was able to reach popular audiences. Note how the "us" can be assumed to be more specifically identified with African-Americans, because not only of the content of the joke, but also because of Pryor's persona as a voice of inner city African-Americans. That is, Pryor is more clearly referencing a social problem. However, the "us" may be extended by some listeners, to encompass all of those groups targeted by the American justice system, such as the poor and lower class. Extending his statement, Pryor's comments can be interpreted on a global scale, and, as a result, further broaden his (assumed) original intention. Pryor's status as a star appealing to a wide range of spectators lends credence to the open interpretive possibilities of the joke.

[182] Worse, due to longstanding historical inequities and prejudice, certain social groups have found themselves disenfranchised from the success schema that typifies mainstream capitalist ideology.

By agency, I mean the ability to act successfully upon the world. For instance, the terms for identifying winners and losers in a contest are exclusive and uncomplicated – they imply certainty. Such a binary sets up an oppositional and hierarchical relationship that may not capture the nuances associated with the value of education or competition. Success is not as simple as one party having the agency to defeat another. There are a great many other factors that are unaccounted for within such a schema, a few of which are performance, social framework, and chance. The winner of a contest, for instance, is specifically, the winner due to a particular performance on a particular day. Social framework refers to the predominant culture's valuing of a particular ability, while chance acknowledges the possibility that success does not solely stem from causal agency.[183] Comparably, failure is not simply being incapable; rather, several other factors may contribute to one's loss. It may not simply be, in Bergsonian terms, a fault in the fool that needs to be corrected. The tendency to treat the hero and academic as an ideal of agency and success, and the habit of laughing at a foolish loser oversimplifies the complex dynamics of success and failure. In particular, if one takes a strict Bergsonian approach, the problem is mapped onto a single character or characterization, avoiding a reflection upon the social forces that may birth or contribute to the complex dynamics of success, failure, and competition within western democratic capitalism. In other words, more than simply correcting the fool, the society itself may require some correction.

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[183] In a sense, we, as North Americans (and perhaps even beyond North America) have been taught to think of success as a causal link between ability, action, and achievement. We do not acknowledge a multitude of other factors. This may be a result of the western emphasis on the individual, which may have one root in the Renaissance belief in the power of the individual to understand and manipulate the natural world. Whatever the roots, if scholars conceive of winning in such a limited manner, we may be contributing to an often negative and narrow-minded way of thinking. In Myers's *The Democracy Reader*, in "Notes on Prejudice," Isaiah Berlin believes "Few things have done more harm than the belief on the part of individuals or groups (or tribes or states or nations or churches) that he or she or they are in *sole* possession of the truth: especially about how to live, what to be & do -- & that those who differ from them are not merely mistaken, but wicked or mad; & need restraining or suppressing. It is terrible and dangerous arrogance to believe that you alone are right; have a magical eye which sees the truth; & that others cannot be right if they disagree" (91). Narrating our success, for instance, in a debate tournament simplifies the multitude of factors involved in the path to victory. Believing in the narration of our causal agency not only reduces an actual event into a simple beginning, middle, and end of "I came, I delivered a paper, I conquered," but it may also be linked to the tendency to believe that one has sole access to the truth. Narrating one's win in another way is not only a call for humility; rather it is a genuine acknowledgment of how much we do not know or cannot convey within a simple (or quite possibly, even within a more complex) narrative.

For film and literary examples that question the certainty of both success and failure, consider the foolish behaviour of Chaplin's tramp and Don Quixote.[184] In *The Gold Rush*, during a dream sequence, the Tramp makes a meal out of his shoe. On the one hand, his behaviour demands correction. One does not eat footwear, even if it is, being leather, derived from an animal that otherwise makes for hearty meals.[185] On the other hand, the Tramp's fantasy reveals the utter poverty of The Lone Prospector, and thus serves as social commentary. The meaning of the Tramp's shoe eating is at least dual and simultaneously so; in other words, on its own, one meaning cannot claim to be the more certain one. Because of this, the fool is not simply someone to laugh at; for instance, in this case, the Tramp is someone audiences can laugh at, sympathize with, and see as a tool for serious social criticism. The argument supporting the socially critical Chaplin is made all the more strong when one acknowledges, as Susan McCabe does in the 2001 *Modernism/modernity* article "Delight in Dislocation," the favourable status afforded Chaplin by the avant-garde: modern comedy "was iconicized for the avant-garde by Chaplin's trademark gestural slapstick" (430).[186] Because of his jerky gait and because of his body's nonpurposive gestures, Charlot, as the French called him, "was considered an avant-garde hero (432-435). The comical elements of the shoe eating sequence are nescient in that they are multi-layered, offering at the very least two polar interpretations: one, the Tramp as foolish dreamer eating an inorganic object; two, the Tramp as avant-garde social critique, where the dream allows for surrealist social critique.[187]

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[184] In *The Gold Rush* (1925), Chaplin specifically plays The Lone Prospector. (Notably, *The Gold Rush* is the last Chaplin film to be completed before the advent of the sound era). Although he plays The Lone Prospector, Chaplin continues the general characterization of The Little Tramp. (The tramp character first emerged in *Kid Auto Races at Venice* (1914), complete with the visual cues of baggy pants, tight coat, big shoes, a small derby hat, a cane, and a toothbrush moustache serving to identify the comic persona). Either as the general figure of The Tramp or the more specific Lone Prospector, both characters can be identified as simply "Chaplin." Leaving national identity aside, in terms of simply characterization, the key figure in *The Gold Rush* refers to three overlapping Chaplin personae, the star Charles Spencer Chaplin, the recurring character-type of The Tramp or The Little Tramp, and the narrative's protagonist, The Lone Prospector.

[185] In an interview with Robert Meryman, Chaplin explains the American historical reference of his shoe eating gag in the following manner: "I got the idea for this gag from the Donner party [a wagon train of 81 pioneers who, heading to California in 1846, became trapped by snow in the Sierra Nevada]. They resorted to cannibalism and to eating a moccasin. And I thought, stewed boots? There's something funny there" (http://books.guardian.co.uk/review/story/0,,1074230,00.html).

Similarly, in *Don Quixote*, the gentleman of La Mancha entrenches himself, not in a dream, but a sustained fantasy that he is a knight, creating his uniform from salvaged material:

> The first thing he did was to scour a suit of armour that had belonged to his great-grandfather, and had lain time out of mind carelessly rusting in a corner, but when he had cleaned and repaired it as well as he could, he perceived there was a material piece wanting; for instead of a complete helmet, there was only a single head-piece: however, his industry supplied that defect; for, with some pasteboard, he made a kind of halt: beaver, or vizor, which being fitted to the head-piece, made it look like an entire helmet. Then, to know whether it was cutlass-proof, he drew his sword, and tried its edge upon the pasteboard

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[186] In ""Delight in Dislocation": The Cinematic Modernism of Stein, Chaplin, and Man Ray," McCabe's main focus is charting Gertrude Stein's relation to cinema and film's relation to modernist poetry and aesthetics. McCabe believes Stein's interest in cultural representations of the hysteric and comic originated from her Radcliffe experience in experimental psychology and her fascination with Chaplin, "whose comedic semiotics of the body she associated with the practice of her poetry" (430). McCabe observes how techniques in experimental film and modern poetry are connected by the modernist crisis of embodiment in psychology and comedy. As both comic critique and ideological critique, the slapstick of Chaplin (as well as Buster Keaton and Harold Lloyd) becomes all the more apparent when set in relation to male bodies of prowess and agency during the early twentieth century. In *Houdini, Tarzan, and the Perfect Man: The White Male Body and the Challenge of Modernity in America*, John Kasson explores the impact of popular discourse surrounding the body of masculine agency.

[187] In addition, there are also other interpretive possibilities in between these poles.

> vizor; but, with the first stroke, he unluckily undid in a moment what he had been a whole week a-doing. (11)

As with the poverty in *The Gold Rush*, Don Quixote, on the one hand, is someone to laugh at. He is a fool who pieces together pathetic, laughable armour. On the other hand, as with The Lone Prospector's larger quest for gold and more immediate desire for simply food, Don Quixote's desperate attempt to attain the prestige and honour of a knight may reveal a serious social problem, the social obsession with prestige and rank. While The Lone Prospector risks his physical life in the Yukon, trying to survive the snow, burly competitors, and his desire for companionship, Don Quixote similarly risks his life, or what is left of a nobleman's life when it does not have the luxuries afforded those with greater money, power, and prestige. While audiences and readers may laugh at The Lone Prospector and Don Quixote for their numerous failures, it is not enough to simply reduce the two figures to characters with an imbalance that needs to be laughed into correction. Perhaps, the laughter can be directed towards not only incompetent fools such as the dreaming Tramp and delusional Don, but also to the society of laughers themselves, at least in the sense that it is the larger society as a whole that places such a distinct material emphasis on success and honour. The layers of interpretation possible regarding the Tramp and Don Quixote should demonstrate how there are uncertainties present in their comic gestures; in other words, the Tramp and Don Quixote are not simply fools to ridicule. Rather, each figure questions the agency of the successful and the responsibility of the unsuccessful by complicating both agency and responsibility with the uncertain (or nescient) through their comedy.

Unfortunately, in the English-language today, there may not yet be the words to describe success and failure in less exclusive, hierarchical, and derogatory terms than those such as Mark Twain's. If language structures the way a person thinks, then the English language may limit the way education, competition, and success are understood. While competition, education, and the pursuit of success can be seen as a means for individual betterment, realistically, competition, education, and success typically mean success over someone else in the American context. Seen in this manner, individual success is not individual at all. Rather, individual success is a highly social phenomenon – and necessarily so. The arête or prestige associated with the individual winner depends upon an undifferentiated and lesser social mass.[188] A difficulty arises in the existence of the Tramp and Don Quixote, because both differentiate the lesser. As members of the lesser and relatively impoverished social mass, the Tramp and the Don signify a resistance to being qualified as simply failures or for that matter, successes.

In contrast with the typically lone Chaplin, Don Quixote's situation is made more complex because of his high class and because of his relation to Sancho Panza. Sancho serves Quixote, but their relationship is not simply one of the higher class (and more capable) master versus the lower class (and less capable) servant. At times, the master-servant hierarchy is reversed; for instance, when Quixote sees giants, not even respect for Quixote's aristocratic status can make the giants appear to Sancho. In this instance, Quixote is the foolish one, while Panza appears to be more level headed. In other words, the peasant is smarter than the noble. It is also significant that Quixote and Panza foster an endearing friendship. In “Game of Circles,” Howard Young cites Rivers, saying, “Elias Rivers has pointed out how the novel is constructed as one long, complex dialogue between Don Quixote and Sancho” (*Philosophy and Literature*, 378-379). Young goes on to point out the originality of the friendship: “Whereas the picaresque novel serves as a source for the *Exemplary Tales*, Luis Murillo is right when he says there are no ‘literary sources’ that can explain the intimacy of the Cervantine dialogues in the *Quixote*” (378-379). Beyond their respective social roles as master and servant, Quixote and Sancho foster a friendship that holds together the entire text and may serve as a comic prototype for other partner texts.[189]

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[188] For instance, the American archetype of the rugged individual conquering the Frontier is not alone in two important ways. One, he is conquering the native population with force. Two, in doing so, he is not going inward to conquer his own demons and shortcomings; rather, he is demonizing those he wishes to or needs to dominate in order to be deemed a successful individual.

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[189] The buddy film, for instance, often pits opposites with one another. Examples include the young, black criminal played by Eddie Murphy and the older, white police officer played by Nick Nolte in *48 Hrs.* or the young, white, suicidal cop played by Mel Gibson and the older, black, family man read for retirement, played by Danny Glover in the *Lethal Weapon* series. The action duo dates at least as far back as Gilgamesh and Enkidu from the Mesopatamian work, *The Epic of Gilgamesh*. They fight one another and then become friends, a concept that is echoed later, for instance, in the meeting of Robin Hood and Little John. Some Hollywood action films echo the Gilgamesh and Enkidu duo by extending the conflict between the principal pair throughout a film or series of film. The conflict, as opposed to the violent battle between Gilgamesh and Enkidu, tends to be more playful. In addition, some Hollywood buddy action films are racialized, with some bearing greater resemblance to the Gilgamesh and Enkidu, than others. For instance, in *48 Hrs.*, Nick Nolte is the civilizing force, while Eddie Murphy plays the wild, criminal. In the 2001 *Cinema Journal*, ““No One Knows You’re Black!”” Jennifer Gillan, reflecting upon the black-white buddy film, cites Ed Guerrero, “who calls this interracial pairing "protective custody"” (48). In the *Lethal Weapon* series, Danny Glover takes on the more civilized role, while Mel Gibson plays the unorthodox police officer. In the *Lethal Weapon* series, although Gibson is the wild character, both Glover and Gibson are police officers, so the line between the civilized and uncivilized (or criminal) is less obvious as with Nolte and Murphy. Building off of Bogle, Gillan goes on to argue that “Donald Bogle describes interracial buddy films as wish-fulfillment vehicles in which the black character is often a supporting player or "background material" in the story of the white man's spiritualization or maturation. Bogle characterizes the black buddy as a cross between an Uncle Tom and a Mammy: "all giving, all-knowing, all-sacrificing nurturer." Such a character often imparts spiritual insight, heightens the white buddy's heroism, and sometimes helps him achieve maturity. He often shows a willingness for self-sacrifice and frequently gives his life for the "white massa/friend." The ideal black buddy is also cleansed of too strong a racial identity and shows no sign of cultural gaps or distinctions that would have to be bridged in order to form a relationship with the white character” (48). Bogle and Gillan’s conception of such a buddy film may be applicable to some films and the black (or ethnic minority) character who is quickly killed off may be a standard (and oft parodied) device, however the buddy relationship has been complicated by *Philadelphia*. Paralleling how the corrupt king Gilgamesh is humbled by Enkidu, the homophobic African-American lawyer played by Denzel Washington in *Philadelphia* overcomes his prejudice by befriending the HIV-stricken white American character played by Tom Hanks. However, even in *Philadelphia*, it can be argued that racism and homophobia are situated as similar types of prejudices, reducing both race and homophobia to an individual’s decision to harbour or not harbour prejudice, rather than acknowledging larger institutional forces and widespread ideologies that foster and perhaps benefit from racism and homophobia.

Despite mistaking windmills for giants, Quixote cannot simply be excused as utterly nonsensical, for he has enough sense to correct the misapplied proverbs of Sancho. In "Two Kinds of Knowing," Anthony J. Cascardi says Quixote chastises Sancho because his proverbs do not fit the circumstance, even though Quixote himself engages in adventures of usually much more dire mistakes (*Philosophy and Literature*, 416-417). Quixote's corrections are funny for a few reasons. One, Quixote seems to develop – suddenly (and incongruously or surprisingly) – some sense; he can point out Sancho's mistake. Two, Quixote is fulfilling his role as the master, ridiculing his servant's lesser intellect. Three, as a manifestation of comical incongruity and possible social comment (because of class power) he can identify the fault in the socially inferior Sancho, but Quixote cannot identify a similar fault in his adventures.

The difference between Sancho's mistakes and Quixote's blunders is that Quixote is following chivalric romances, for which there is no practical reference, whereas since Sancho promises practical knowledge; there is a proven way Sancho's words should match reality. In "Two Kinds of Knowing," Cascardi says a proverb

> depends for its efficacy on the circumstances of its enunciation and on the topicality of its theme. Indeed, there is an irreducibly *ad hoc* quality characteristic of all proverbial speech. Were ordinary experience fully uniform then one might reduce the number of proverbs to a single few and schematize their content. But since this is not the case, the wisdom of the proverb is to be found as much in the manner and mode of its articulation, which respond to the contours of experience, as in the content of what is said. (415-416)

Unlike Sancho, who is referencing proverbs (presumably) from the actual world of the Spanish reader, Quixote's actions may have no home other than within the pages of a chivalric fiction. Quixote comically reverses the mimetic relation between life and art, quite possibly, to point out how art may not simply imitate life and to point out how life may itself be an act of fiction.

Quixote's corrections point to a capability with practical knowledge and authority. Quixote does not simply correct Sancho, because Quixote believes himself to be inherently superior to Sancho; rather, Quixote's corrections highlight the importance of practical leadership. For Cascardi, *Don Quixote* deals with the Platonic critique of art directly through Quixote's critique of the Canon of Toledo and indirectly through the example of Quixote and Sancho. In "Two Kinds of Knowing," Cascardi moves beyond the typical traditional tendency to associate Cervantes's critique of Plato with Aristotle's *Poetics*; instead, Cascardi turns to Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* and its stress on praxis, or practical knowledge. When he catches Sancho's mistakes, Quixote demonstrates the importance of phronēsis, or intelligent pragmatic judgment. On the one hand, Quixote is performing the role of the authority, correcting the servant. On the other hand, Quixote wields a skill with proverbs and their practical application that ties him very much within the world of Sancho, rather than above it, as Cascardi explains:

> the proverb epitomizes knowledge drawn from practical experience, supported by tradition, transmitted through the generations. Hence the notion that proverbs hold the ethics of the common people. They were thought to possess a wisdom that precedes the invention of philosophy itself. Since, in the words of Mal Lara, reason is itself more ancient than Plato, it should come as no surprise to find that there were proverbs in Spain long before there were philosophers in Greece (*Philosofia vulgar*, Preámbulo, 8). (415)

The aristocratic Quixote not only befriends the lower Sancho Panza, but also accepts (through his knowledge of their correct usage) the authority of folk wisdom, and thus, practical politics. Hence, Cascardi argues *Don Quixote* supports a politics that "must respond to ordinary experience, which is fundamentally heterogeneous and so not reducible to ideal forms" (411). That is, "while political science may require theory, politics is a practice that must be carried out within a realm of experience that has no regulative structure of its own" (411). The knights of chivalric romances have political impact; when a heroic (or religious) text takes on a central place within a culture, its political function may be more apparent. In a way, *Don Quixote* reveals how the nations which claim an idealistic chivalric romantic past are all like Quixote himself, slim entities suiting themselves up in the disguise of an imitative armour that they hope everyone will accept as the real thing. The difference between Quixote and a nation re-writing history or needing the fantastic heroism of knights, however, is that a belief in better values is worth pursuing for the endearing Quixote, but as the out-of-place quality of Quixote demonstrates, there appears to be a large gap between the values of lived experience and those heralded by popular chivalric romances. While readers may laugh at Quixote's chivalric fantasy being applied to what is representative of lived experience, Quixote cannot be quarantined to the status of ridiculed target, for he also teaches readers (a society producing and consuming chivalric romances, but living closer to the fictional realism depicted by Cervantes), the value of practical leadership. In terms of their pairing, while Don Quixote is socially higher than Sancho Panza, their friendship is more than simply a social contract of superior and inferior, of one simply ridiculing the other.

By the narrative's end, when he realizes the illusion of his life, Don Quixote dies; in a sense, Quixote moves from self-ignorance to self-realization, discovering fantasy to be his problem. However, his death is more than a point of ridicule, or a marker of failure. While Don Quixote believed in chivalric values, no one genuinely believed in Don Quixote. Quixote's death is a signal of how society has failed him. Society pretends to believe in the noble values of chivalric heroism, but upholds (unfriendly) ridiculing attitudes, and self-serving behaviour. In his own way, like the Tramp, Don Quixote too is a lone prospector, mining the kernels of hopeful virtue that are planted in his mind by his study of knight-errantry; but, unlike the Tramp, who ends the film with gold and the girl, Don Quixote is not allowed to conclude with the dream. Nevertheless, his death also makes him a martyr of sorts, someone who arouses our sympathy and empathy, rather than simply ridicule. In this way, Quixote's death is a success, for it brings poignancy to a world that tends to value the self-serving more than the virtuous.

Returning to Chaplin, by the film's end, the Lone Prospector is successful in *The Gold Rush*, but the film's closure is not enough of a gesture to grant triumph the value of agency. Finding gold takes work, but the entire enterprise is also riddled with the spirit of a lottery, of chance. As a result, in the Yukon or the Spain of comic dreams, success and failure are not simply polar opposites. Whatever success the Tramp attains cannot be reduced to causal agency and whatever failure Don Quixote experiences cannot be reduced to blaming his foolishness, unknowing, and ridiculousness – as is implied by (the popular conception of) Alger's paradigm.[190] The terms success and failure are far too limiting to adequately describe Don Quixote and the Tramp. Through endearing comical characters, *Don Quixote* and *The Gold Rush* demonstrate how success and failure are more complicated concepts than their standard definitions imply, definitions that are very important to the idea of success in America.

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[190] Alger's paradigm will be taken to mean hard work plus ethics equals material and social success. Although Alger's stories include chance and demonstrate protagonists that achieve modest success, the popular imagination has exaggerated the causal agency of the Alger protagonist and heightened the degree

> The Puritans, our ancestors, a people so uptight, the English kicked them out.
> (Robin Williams, "I'm an Episcopal," *Live 2002*)

II. Lazy Fools: The Difficulty with Alger and The Puritans

Regarding the narration of individual success, the value of upward mobility has one of its North American narrative roots in the Horatio Alger success story, whereby a simple equation of hard work plus ethics promises financial and material success.[191] It is important to look briefly at the impact of narratives such as those by Alger, Weems, and McGuffey during the nineteenth century, because their narratives provide us with a protagonist whose agency, the ability to alter the world, leads to his success in what will be commonly regarded as a causal and thus certain fashion.[192] The popular Alger

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of success he attains. Hence, in the North American popular culture of 2006, a Horatio Alger narrative is considered synonymous with an uplifting underdog story of great triumph, as in *Rocky* or *Cinderella Man.*

[191] Horatio Alger Jr. (1834-1899) was a writer of educational juvenile fiction. During the 19th century, the works of Mason Locke Weems, William H. McGuffey, and Horatio Alger helped to solidify the American dream success story, where hard work and virtue lead to material and social success, but it was Alger's name that became synonymous with the American Dream story, that continues to function as a popular myth in fiction (and in actual life). For instance, in cinema, the *Rocky* series and more recently, *Cinderella Man* are examples of such a success story. Such a myth seems most stable in the sports film. Critiques of material success also exist within popular cinema, with *Citizen Kane* being one renowned film that includes a critique of the powerful capitalist as part of its plot.

[192] In *The Dream of Success*, Kenneth S. Lynn explains the popular success myth in the following manner: "The belief in the potential greatness of the common man, the glorification of individual effort and accomplishment, the equation of the pursuit of money with the pursuit of happiness and of business success with spiritual grace: simply to mention these concepts is to comprehend the brilliance of Alger's synthesis" (7). In *Poor Richard's Principle*, Robert Wuthnow believes the American dream is more than material pursuit: the American dream "supplies understandings about why one should work hard and about the value of having money, but it does so in a way that guards against money and work being taken as ends in themselves. It creates mental maps that allow distinctions to be drawn between economic behavior and other commitments. It draws deeply on implicit understandings about the family, community, and the

paradigm implies a shadow paradigm, where another relationship exists within the cultural imagination: laziness equals failure.[193] Over time, Alger-type stories become an integral part of the democratic capitalist social fabric, which in turn may impact the way individuals in the real world understand and narrate success or react to failure, especially when coupled with the example and advice of an eighteenth century American example of self-sufficiency and cognitive agency: Benjamin Franklin.

However, before looking at the contemporary conception of the Alger myth as stemming from hard work and leading to great fortune and fame, a brief look at Alger's early connection with the luck of patronage is required.[194] In "Celeb-Reliance: Intellectuals, Celebrity, and Upward Mobility," referring to Cawelti, Bruce W. Robbins explains this now overlooked connection in popular parlance:

> As many critics have noticed, Alger's stories are not in fact the tales of triumphant self-reliance they are popularly thought to be. "Alger's heroes are rarely 'alone and unaided,'" John Cawelti noted in 1965, "and do not win their success entirely through individual effort and accomplishment. From the very beginning of his career, the Alger boy demonstrates an astounding propensity for chance encounters with benevolent and useful friends, and

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sacred. It comes in many varieties, reflecting different ethnic, religious, regional, and occupational subcultures. But its core assumptions transcend these subcultures" (4). For Wuthnow the American dream is a transcultural phenomenon, because of its emphasis on personal happiness.

[193] I am not quite sure what the exact opposing equation to the Alger equation is; that is, I have not quite worked that out with something that feels comfortable. Hence, I will leave it at laziness equalling failure, so as to emphasize that failure is regarded as primarily the fault of an agent, dismissing cultural forces such as racism, economic inequality, and so on. Alger's equation also implies the notion of corrupt success, which possibly has an equation as well. However, at this time, rather than drafting implied equations, I will focus upon exploring the more explicit equation of the popular conception of Alger and success.

[194] The stress on the self-determinism of the self-made individual may have something to due with Tom Nissley's view of alienation. In *Intimate and Authentic Economies*, Tom Nissley explains: "the stories of the self-made man are dramas of alienation. I mean "alienation" not in the broad psychological sense of estrangement and anomie that has been its more common usage in the twentieth century, but rather in its more narrow legal and economic sense, referring to the transfer of one's property to another. The basis of the self-making process in those stories is the idea of possessive individualism, as famously outlined by C. B. Macpherson, in which the individual is seen, in keeping with the first pair of scenes described above, as "the proprietor of his own person or capacities, owing nothing to society for them" (3). Rather than owing one's self and particularly ones labor to the community as a whole or to a hereditary superior, one is thought to own oneself and to be the sole determinant of one's labor and its products" (4-5).

> his success is largely due to their patronage and assistance" (109). (http://muse.jhu.edu.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/journals/postmodern_culture/v009/9.2robbins.html)

Two important qualifications are worthy of elaboration. One, chance encounters do factor into the upward journey of Alger's characters. So, the possibility of highlighting the role of chance in achieving material and social success was there in Alger, but the popular culture comes to accentuate causal agency to the point that Alger is synonymous with a hard working protagonist, an everyman whose work and determination lead him to not only success, but to an awesome degree of success. Two, even contemporary narratives identified as upholding the Alger myth are not without chance encounters or the aid of benefactors, but their classification as Alger-type stories places a stress on the causal agency of the underdog, instead of the lucky assistance of wealthy and willing patrons. For instance, in *Rocky*, the titular hero receives a shot at the title because of the champion's generosity; the match is a gimmick to celebrate the American Bicentennial. In *The Replacements*, because professional football players go on strike, the owners need to find replacement players, thus allowing unknown players a chance to live their dream. (The Sentinels are located in Washington, and like the reference to the bicentennial in *Rocky*, is an explicitly patriotic American reference). In *Cinderella Man*, James J. Braddock's trainer seals a difficult and lucky deal, signing the virtually unranked Braddock to fight the number two contender; in addition, during one sequence, the impoverished fighter begs for money. In other words, moments of luck and charity are at work, but popular reviews have primarily stressed the work (or for Peter Travers, the American agency) of Braddock.[195]

Even if it is less acknowledged in the popular imagination of Alger, chance is crucial to the original Alger texts.[196] In the *Children's Literature* article "Endless Frontiers," Aaron Shaheen points out how capitalism in *Ragged Dick* is formulated as an endless frontier, after Turner and Lewis, of abundance and opportunity. However, this abundance and opportunity is not turned into profit through simple agency; rather, luck plays into the narrative trajectory:

> Over the years several critics have commented on Dick's unbelievable luck. The fact that he runs into Frank Whitney and his uncle, or that Frank gives Dick a set of his old clothes, is based on being in the right place at the right time. And of course, as R. Richard Wohl has pointed out, luck is by definition "unearnable" (503). Luck contradicts the ethic of hard work, which is an essential component to any capitalist success story. (23-24)

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[195] In *The New York Times*, Manhola Dargis notes "The story of how this well-regarded boxer down on his luck faced those odds is one of the most celebrated in American sport, so it's a wonder it has never before been told on-screen" (http://movies2.nytimes.com/gst/movies/movie.html?v_id=290416). Dargis implies that Braddock's story is made for the Hollywood sports film; in a sense, although a narrative about Braddock has never been developed for cinema, the story has been told before and will most likely be told again. Because of the Alger mythos, it is not incorrect to emphasize the film's inspirational individualism; in a way, the popular category of an Alger story helps one downplay a narrative's, whether fictional or non-fictional, elements of chance. On *CNN.com*, Paul Clinton points out how the story is a repeated one: "In many ways, you've seen "Cinderella Man" before. The boxing movie is a Hollywood mainstay; so is the comeback story. "Rocky" (1976) combined both to Oscar-winning glory, and just two years ago, "Seabiscuit" mined much of the same underdog territory on the horse tracks" (http://www.cnn.com/2005/SHOWBIZ/Movies/06/03/review.cinderella/index.html). In *Rolling Stone*, Peter Travers directly identifies the film's link to wider American values, presenting Braddock as a simple family man determined to beat poverty through his skill with boxing violence and his relentless heart, and thus, claims the film demonstrates how director Ron Howard "believes in America" (http://www.rollingstone.com/reviews/movie/_/id/6173886?pageid=rs.ReviewsMovieArchive&pageregion=mainRegion&rnd=1138556398006&has-player=unknown).

[196] The power of the popular conception of Alger is explained in *The Fictional Republic*, when Carol Nackenoff says: Alger "has become a household name unlike almost any other. It is not because his works are still widely read or known, but because the name itself is a stand-in for ideas supposedly derived from his fiction that "Horatio Alger" has entered the language and discourse of daily life" (3). In other words, there is a distinction between Alger's actual texts and Alger as identifying a popular association between agency and success.

If the popular association of Alger with an underdog's success story is any evidence, then it seems as though capitalist discourse (or perhaps a belief in individual agency) has effectively effaced the role of chance in favour of the more certain mathematics of hard work plus good ethics equals success. (Note how the equation itself combines both the rhetoric of science and the simplicity of folk wisdom). Due to the Puritan influence, perhaps, the ethical part of the equation allows for luck; that is, lucky chances go to the morally deserving, such as James J. Braddock. In *Cinderella Man*, James J. Braddock works the docks and the heavy bag, so his demonstration of Puritan discipline is clear. In addition, he is a faithful husband, and a loving father, so his ethics are also in line. It follows then, that Braddock must win the championship, especially from a philandering bully of an extravagant champion, who is depicted as murderous (having killed or caused injuries, which led to the death of two opponents).

It is also noteworthy to consider how Alger, as well as *Rocky* and *Cinderella Man*, move the boundless American frontier to the city.[197] (In fact, in "Endless Frontiers," this is Shaheen's main interest in the function of time and space in *Ragged Dick*). Although his last name is Hunter, not unlike savvy woodsman Natty Bumppo or his inspiration Daniel Boone, Dick, perhaps named after Franklin's *Poor Richard*, is a man of the city.[198] Not unlike contemporary cinematic action heroes, Dick Hunter makes witty quips and is resourceful, although his goals are much less lofty than spectacular heroics.[199] But, like a natural cornucopia, the American city promises the endless momentum of capitalist progress, and, for those who fit the equation, financial reward and cultural prestige. This promise exists, despite the very problem of surplus labour roaming the streets, a problem initially personified by Dick Hunter.[200] Distinguishing himself from the masses of unemployed immigrants and freed African-Americans that were coming to

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[197] A major difference with Alger's story and current manifestations is that Alger's hero rises up, but not to great renown. In "Playing At Class," Karen Sánchez-Eppler explains the distinction in the following manner: "Critics of Alger's tales have not only pointed out the gap between his novels and the real conditions of street-children in New York, but also, both more surprisingly and more interestingly, the divergence between his novels and the "rags to riches" mythos that has grown out of them. Not only do Alger's heroes rarely achieve riches, settling rather for the humble rewards of office jobs, but even this small success is never dependent upon the skill and industry with which they work their street jobs. Rather, Alger's heroes get their "chance" at respectability through extra-professional services rendered to the wealthy" (*ELH*, 825). In contrast, Rocky gains respect because he fights the heavyweight champion and in subsequent films, he wins and re-gains the championship. Similarly, Braddock becomes champion of the world, whereas Dick becomes an office clerk. Certainly, the Alger myth has grown, in the public imagination, well beyond its initial and more humble notions of success.

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[198] Perhaps there is a link between Franklin's *Poor Richard*, Alger's Dick, and Dick as a protégé in the comic book series and films *Batman*. Dick Greyson (Robin) is the ward of Bruce Wayne (Batman). In *Ragged Dick*, Mr. Greyson is the name of the first adult helper that Dick Hunter meets; perhaps Bob Kane (creator of Batman along with the uncredited Bill Finger) derived the name of Bruce Wayne's ward from Alger. Bruce Wayne's name derives from the historical Scottish figure, Robert the Bruce (1274-1329), and the American Revolutionary War Brigadier General, "Mad Anthony" Wayne (1745-1796). The mentor and student relationship is played out in *Batman Begins*, with Bruce Wayne (Christian Bale) learning various fighting methods from Henri Ducard (Liam Neeson), as well as in several other films, including the *Star Wars* series and the *Matrix* series.

[199] Consider the following exchange from *Ragged Dick*: ""I'm afraid you haven't washed your face this morning," said Mr. Whitney, for that was the gentleman's name. "They didn't have no wash-bowls at the hotel where I stopped," said Dick. "What hotel did you stop at?" "The Box Hotel." "The Box Hotel?" "Yes, sir, I slept in a box on Spruce Street"" (http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5348/5348.txt). Action heroes such as Arnold Schwarzenegger also make room in their adventures for witty remarks, with one of his most famous from and as *The Terminator*, being a deadpanned, "I'll be back."

[200] In "Endless Frontiers," Shaheen offers evidence of migration patterns to New York, commenting on the strain that was placed on limited resources by the promise of unlimited future wealth: "even before the Civil War, northeastern cities such as New York, Boston, and Philadelphia were experiencing tremendous population booms. Between 1830 and 1860 nearly two million Irish immigrants came to America; during those same years over a million and a half German immigrants arrived. In the decade of the 1850s, the time when *Ragged Dick* most likely takes place, over 1.8 million Irish and German immigrants entered the country, primarily through Boston and New York. In that decade, the overall immigrant population explosion reached slightly under 2.6 million (Bailey and Kennedy 316). While many of the German immigrants had enough money to settle in the Midwest, most others who arrived—particularly the Irish—stayed in the eastern cities to find any work available to them. Simultaneously, as a result of what Marx has called "primitive accumulation," which is a process whereby capitalists strip the countryside of its resources, more people from the American yeomanry relocated to the city in search of wage labor. But for these dispossessed farmers and immigrants, the promise of earning a decent wage—of becoming respectable just as Dick does—was often spurious. As David Harvey argues, "Left to its own devices, unchecked and unregulated, free market capitalism would end up depleting and ultimately destroying the two sources of its own wealth—the labor and the soil" (*Spaces of Hope* 28). Promising wealth, the cities often delivered misery. Over time they became centers of poverty as a growing supply of unskilled laborers was forced to work for smaller wages. To recast Harvey's sentiments in more temporal terms, the urban landscape held little promise for the future; the northern city was already becoming the site where capitalism's present had caught up with its future. By the time of the novel's serial publication, immigrant woes were further compounded by the first small waves of emancipated slaves who moved from the South to find work in northern and midwestern urban centers. Given these historical circumstances, surplus labor was inevitable" (26-27).

American cities, Dick believes in a prosperous future within the burgeoning capitalist urban landscape. In this sense, his belief and his ethics explain his luck. Because Dick learns to move from being a smoking, lazy outcast to a productive capitalist, he deserves his luck. Early in the text Dick admits that he does not steal, and so, if his morals are clean, then the luck of a wealthy patron will come his way.[201]

Despite the existence of patronage in Alger's stories or the function of chance in contemporary narratives identified as Alger-type underdog stories, the culture comes to identify the signifier Alger alongside values of hard work and good ethics that will lead to material and social success.[202] Such a conceptual convergence of mathematical/scientific formula (signifying a predictive hypothesis or even natural law) and folk wisdom (based upon past experience and knowledge) ties simultaneously into the past and the future, providing a continuum of American-ness. Yesterday, hard work conquered the west; tomorrow, hard work will conquer Wall Street. Promising success, the formula embodies the forward momentum of not only material desire but also the glory of salvation (in the language of science or math), while it echoes the tone of homespun advice (with an almost superstitious flavour). Popular culture's Alger equation may be linked to the earlier influence of Benjamin Franklin and ongoing influence of Puritan values, which in turn feed into an exclusive distinction between agency (causing success) and the lack of agency (causing failure).

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[201] Early in *Ragged Dick*, an exchange occurs as follows: “"You don't catch me stealin', if that's what you mean," said Dick. "Don't you ever steal, then?" "No, and I wouldn't. Lots of boys does it, but I wouldn't." "Well, I'm glad to hear you say that. I believe there's some good in you, Dick, after all." "Oh, I'm a rough customer!" said Dick. "But I wouldn't steal. It's mean." "I'm glad you think so, Dick," and the rough voice sounded gentler than at first. "Have you got any money to buy your breakfast?" "No, but I'll soon get some."” (http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5348/5348.txt). Dick then proceeds to pull himself up, by going to the street to shine shoes. Despite his status in life, Dick does not resort to stealing, and he works for his money. While shining the shoes of his first customer of the day (who luckily is a big-hearted man), readers also learn that Dick does not lie. Not having change for the quarter he is given (for a shine worth ten cents), Dick promises to return the change when he has it. Dick does return the change, but not after a restaurant clerk tries to cheat Dick out of his money; fortunately, the day's first shoe shine customer is called upon to help clear matters up. Shortly after that, Dick receives a suit from Mr. Whitey, a friendly adult that offers Dick a suit after Dick offers to show Mr. Whitey's visiting nephew Frank a tour of the city. Dick's new suit becomes symbolic of his changing demeanour and status. Hence, in the end, after Dick rescues a drowning boy, Dick is rewarded once again with a new suit and lands a new job: “Dick left the counting-room, hardly knowing whether he stood on his head or his heels, so overjoyed was he at the sudden change in his fortunes. Ten dollars a week was to him a fortune, and three times as much as he had expected to obtain at first. Indeed he would have been glad, only the day before, to get a place at three dollars a week. He reflected that with the stock of clothes which he had now on hand, he could save up at least half of it, and even then live better than he had been accustomed to do; so that his little fund in the savings bank, instead of being diminished, would be steadily increasing. Then he was to be advanced if he deserved it. It was indeed a bright prospect for a boy who, only a year before, could neither read nor write, and depended for a night's lodging upon the chance hospitality of an alley-way or old wagon. Dick's great ambition to "grow up 'spectable" seemed likely to be accomplished after all” (http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5348/5348.txt).

[202] Alger's *Ragged Dick* or *Street Life in New York with the Boot-Blacks* first appeared as a serialization for *Schoolmate*, a juvenile magazine, in 1867. The novel's premise addresses the problem of homeless children living on the streets of New York; so, it is built upon a serious social and economic problem. However, it fails to delve into the plight of the homeless, unemployed, or underemployed; rather, the premise is used to serve as simply a realistic starting point for the hero's rise. Quite possibly, Alger's picture of orphaned children may be an overstatement, according to at least one critic. In *With Good Intentions?*, Bill Kaufman claims: “Alger notwithstanding, few Ragged Dicks were orphans. NCLC operative E. C. Clopper found that over 75 percent of four hundred Cincinnati newsboys were from intact

During the eighteenth century, Benjamin Franklin's *Autobiography* and his *Poor Richard's Almanac* were earlier examples of the path to success.[203] In his lifetime, Benjamin Franklin was recognized as a great and multi-talented thinker, whose hard work delivered him success, from the development of *The Pennsylvania Gazette* to his experiments in electricity and his various inventions. Although Franklin's

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families. Myron E. Adams, a New York City social worker, determined that "only a very small number" of boys in the street trades were from alms-deserving families. Josephine Goldmark reported that just one-quarter of the incarcerated ex-newsboys she studied were raised by widows" (6).

[203] Paul Leicester Ford, a historian and novelist, wrote *The True George Washington* (1896), which aimed to present Washington as a fallible human being, rather than the perfect American. In doing so, Ford may influence at least two tendencies in American popular culture. One, by making Washington not unlike the average individual, then Ford indirectly implies that anyone may achieve the success of Washington. Two, Ford creates a prototype for Hollywood imperfect hero, who paradoxically may perform superhuman feats of intelligence and physical prowess, but is also vulnerable and average. The everyman type of protagonist presents a family man, (such as James J. Braddock (Russell Crow) in *Cinderella Man*, Harry Tasker (Arnold Schwarzenegger) in *True Lies*, Jack Ryan (Harrison Ford) in *Patriot Games*), who must perform amazing physical and/or intellectual feats. Even comic book heroes such as Superman, Spiderman, or Batman lead double-lives where they express very down-to-earth desires or interests. For instance, Clark Kent is a nerdy journalist who desires the attention of Lois Lane. Similarly, Peter Parker is a nerdy student who wants to care for his aunt and date Mary Jane Watson, while developing a career as a photojournalist. Of the three, Bruce Wayne is the only suave multi-millionaire, but unlike the other two, Wayne has no superpowers. Rather, Bruce Wayne achieves his abilities through hard work and training; in addition, Bruce Wayne as Batman is physically vulnerable. Also, his motivation to fight injustice stems from a childhood trauma, the murder of his parents, which results in his lifelong desire to cleanse the city of its criminal influence and rampant corruption.

Autobiography lacks tight causal continuity, his anecdotes help popularize the notion that hard work and some discipline causally moves one to expertise. Consider the following account of Franklin's mastery of French and Italian:

> I had begun in 1733 to study languages; I soon made myself so much a master of the French as to be able to read the books with ease. I then undertook Italian. An acquaintance, who was also learning it, used often to tempt me to play chess with him. Finding this took up too much of the time I had to spare for study, I at length refused to play any more, unless on this condition, that the victor in every game should have a right to impose a task, either in the parts of the grammar to be got by heart, or in translations, etc, which tasks the vanquished was to perform upon honor, before our next meeting. As we played pretty equally, we thus beat one another into that language. I afterwards with a little painstaking, acquired as much of the Spanish as to read their books also. (*Highlights of American Literature*, 11)

Franklin goes on to explain how he discovers that through his study of the Romance language, one day, he was able to pick up and understand a Latin Testament, so, he decided to resume and master his study of Latin as well. Then, Franklin offers curriculum advice to educational institutions: because it will be easier for them to acquire Latin, teach children the Romance languages and then Latin. Franklin's account of his days acquiring languages is an inspirational one, demonstrating the human potential for intellectual growth. On its own, the causal connection between work and success is certainly plausible and needs little illustration; nevertheless, the causal equation seems to be obsessively reiterated since Franklin. Unfortunately, despite its frequent reincarnations, or maybe because of it, the causal Alger equation does not acknowledge the more uncertain factors outside one's own agency or lack of effort. For instance, taking a deliberately critical perspective on this period in Franklin's life reveals that

Franklin's path is not the one that everyone traverses. It is difficult to dispute the value of focus, determination, and hard work; unfortunately, for some people, a difficulty in life is not as simple as finding a way to fit in both games of chess and language self-study. Franklin's life is one of leisure, wealth, and privilege. While this sample of his autobiography may be inspiring to a student of language, it may not be as feasible for those less wealthy readers of his *Poor Richard's Almanac*, which helped to make Franklin anything but poor.

A more critical reading from Franklin's *Autobiography* makes the following quote from his *Almanac* less inspiring: "Laziness travels so slowly, that Poverty soon overtakes him" (*Highlights of American Literature*, 15).[204] One reading takes the line as a strict warning against laziness. However, it would be mistaken to believe all poverty stems from laziness. The line, then, upholds the notion that failure is caused by a lack of agency. In Franklin, America finds one of its first models of the enterprising scholar, in a time when new ideas promised profit. While his life's work and contributions to science and politics are genuinely inspiring, when his thoughts are taken alongside the later work of Alger's and the earlier ideals of Puritanism, then Franklin contributes to a simplistic and binary conception of success and failure.

The early American emphasis on hard work highlights a Puritanical, especially Calvinist, conception of capitalism.[205] In *Sudden Glory*, Sanders points out how

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[204] Benjamin Franklin had a fondness for English satire, especially the essays of Joseph Addison and Richard Steele, appearing in their periodical, *The Spectator*. It is possible then, that some of Franklin's sayings may be emphasized for their witty moralizing, and perhaps even satire or irony. However, Franklin's persona as a leading figure in the development of the United States leans one to take some his advice somewhat seriously. Other advice in his *Almanack* is more clearly humorous, but the humour is of the sort that presents a valid observation or pragmatic advice. Nevertheless, however atypical, the possibility for a more subversive reading is there.

[205] John Calvin was a 16th Century Protestant reformer who argued that being in God's favour did not depend upon faith or good deeds, but instead, God's mercy.

Sociologist Max Weber first made the connection between Puritanism and the rise of capitalism, noting how capitalist success became proof of spiritual election. Sanders explains the Calvinist connection to capitalism in the following manner:

> Calvinists believed that people could not earn salvation, however, through striving alone. Yes, they had to work, but that in itself did not guarantee election. Along with that striving, Calvin argued, the elect would eventually manifest outward signs that God had rewarded their particular toil. (226)

Sander's emphasis is on the outward sign of a calm demeanour.[206] However, along with reserved behaviour, other more material signs can be added to Sander's markers of the elect. As material wealth relates to capitalism and perceived indicators of spirituality, with a burgeoning middle class, economic success was advantageous not only for the immediate material benefits, but also for the implied spiritual favour.

The stress on wealth fostered a culture of both working hard to earn and save money, from which an early American comic variation arose through Washington Irving. *Rip Van Winkle: A Posthumous Writing of Diedrich Knickerbocker* told the story of a man who, turning laziness into an art, sleeps away much of his life[207]:

> Rip Van Winkle, however was one of those happy mortals, of foolish, well-oiled dispositions, who take the world easy, eat white bread or brown, whichever can be got with least thought or trouble, and would rather starve on a penny than work for a pound. If left to himself, he would have whistled life away in perfect contentment; but his wife kept continually dinning in his ears about his idleness, his

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[206] In *Sudden Glory*, Sanders discusses the history of western attitudes towards laughter, so his overall analysis does not analyze the connection between capitalism and Puritanism; nevertheless, his insights into the Puritan influence on social attitudes are relevant.

[207] "Rip Van Winkle" is inspired by the German "Peter Klaus the Goatherd" by J.C.C. Nachtigal. Supposedly, Diedrich Knickerbocker according to Carl Bode in *Highlights of American Literature* is a reference to Irving's value of the Dutch penchant for hard work and thriftiness.

> carelessness, and the ruin he was bringing on his family.
> (*Highlights of American Literature*, 17)

Benjamin Franklin's warning against laziness is demonstrable in the Van Winkle characterization. Rip Van Winkle is far from being the ideal American man that Benjamin Franklin embodied; rather, Van Winkle's lack of hard work and thus lack of success brings shame to the family and, from the way Irving characterizes him, causes one's wife to nag, who in turn, causes even greater desire for Van Winkle to escape the domestic space and hence the watchful eye of his wife: "Times grew worse and worse with Rip Van Winkle as years of matrimony rolled on; a tart temper never mellows with age, and a sharp tongue is the only edged tool that grows keener with constant use" (*Highlights of American Literature*, 17). The heterosexual normative domestic unit has been disrupted by Van Winkle's inability to be the patriarchal provider. In the public space, after his big sleep, Van Winkle returns to realize that he has missed the Revolutionary war; so, in this regard as well, Van Winkle forsakes his duties, both as a man and an American, for an extended nap. When he inquires about Van Bummel, Van Winkle is told: "He went off to the wars, too, was a great militia general, and is now in Congress" (Paragraph 43, http://www.bartleby.com/195/4.html). The implication then is that Van Winkle is also a coward and worse, a "nobody." Van Winkle cries out, ""Does nobody here know Rip Van Winkle?" (Paragraph 44, http://www.bartleby.com/195/4.html). More than simply a lack of being sure of who he is, because he has fallen asleep for twenty years, Van Winkle's confused lamentation over who he is signals his very failure as an American man, to forge his identity through his work and success. Even after sleeping away his life, Van Winkle easily succumbs to his failing:

> Having nothing to do at home, and being arrived at that happy age when a man can do nothing with impunity, he took his place once more on the bench, at the inn door, and was reverenced as one of the patriarchs of the village, and a chronicle of the old times "before the war." It was some time before he could get into the regular track of gossip, or could be made to comprehend the strange events that had taken place during his torpor. (Paragraph 61, http://www.bartleby.com/195/4.html)

Emerging American identity seized upon notions of progress, enterprise, ingenuity, and of course, success. Van Winkle represented the comic antithesis of that, a lesson of how not to live one's life; that is, by sleeping away in laziness and settling for idleness. In Hollywood, it is typical for the hero to be rebel, who often challenges authority in order to pursue his own brand of justice. This tendency may tie back to the history of the Revolutionary war, where America first solidifies itself as hero-rebels, not unlike the stalwart resolve of Achilles versus Agammemnon. When it comes to the American heroic standard of the rebel hero, Van Winkle did not revolt; rather, he slept.[208]

Rather than taking the social role of the manly husband, Rip Van Winkle is a lazy individual (who avoids both work and his nagging wife), a type of slothful, misbehaving child. Consider how the fear of his wife may not be unlike a boy's fear of his mother; possibly, Twain's Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn are modeled after Irving's early comic antithesis of American heroism, hard work, and determination. In "Playing at Class," Karen Sánchez-Eppler believes that "The invention of childhood entailed the creation of a protracted period in which the child would ideally be protected from the difficulties and responsibilities of daily life – ultimately including the need to work" (*ELH*, 819). In a static state symbolized by sleeping away his life, Van Winkle never learns how to become a productive adult. Instead, Rip Van Winkle remains in a state that comes to be even further exemplified by Tom and Huck, because they are actually presented as children – moreover, as misbehaving children. Note how the first words of Alger's *Ragged Dick* are simply "Wake up there, youngster" (http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5348/5348.txt). Owing to the association between laziness and a lack of intelligence, Dick is said to open his eyes slowly and stupidly (http://www.gutenberg.org/files/5348/5348.txt). For the 2002 *Children's Literature* article "Endless Frontiers," Aaron Shaheen believes *Ragged Dick*'s typifies perpetual progression, with Dick faithfully moving towards a future of capitalistic fruits; hence, for Shaheen it is significant the reader encounters Dick "on the day when his entire worldview changes, the day when Dick stops living exclusively in calendrical, historical time and begins to see himself as part of a larger economy whose expansion relies on never slowing down in the present moment" (23). Unproductive play, the domain of childhood, needs to be outgrown in order for a boy to pass into the domain of productive masculinity. Laziness, playful fantasy, neglecting work, making mistakes, and even learning, are all characteristically the domain of childhood in Tom and Huck. Implicitly, such qualities have no place in the adult world of cognitive prowess and agency. Rip Van Winkle's counterparts have fought in the Revolutionary War or had otherwise productive and patriotic lives. The escape that Rip Van Winkle longs for is the life that is impossible for Ragged Dick, but is one that Huck lives.

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[208] Less obviously, the rebellion mythos finds its way into comic theory as well, especially with overtones of revolution (in this case, inspired by Marx, rather than democracy, but both united by being calls of equality for all people) in certain variations of the carnivalesque, such as Bakhtin's.

Unlike Van Winkle, who, typically, is a comic target, Huck Finn is considered a more complicated figure. On the one hand, Huck Finn is a comic target, because like Van Winkle, Finn is a lazy outcast. On the other hand, because he has the excuse (or perhaps comic safety-valve) of being a child, Huck can get away with a great deal more than Van Winkle can. Adults need to be productive, or perhaps more appropriately, present the image of being productive. However, many of the adults Huck meets behave much like bad children do, although on a much more destructive scale; worse, while Tom and Huck may be spanked for their transgressions, there is no higher authority that spanks the adults – adulthood allows one to get away with the desires of youth, because successful adulthood grants authority and greater self determination. While Tom enjoys a fantasy adventure of playing robbers, the Grangerfords and the Shepherdsons have been engaging in a destructive generational feud. Similarly, the Duke and the King spend their time posing as royalty, in an effort to swindle money. The Grangerfords and Shepherdsons represent the aristocratic class, but their feuding lacks class (in the sense of refined behaviour); social class does not bring greater sense to behaviour that can be likened to the tantrums and bitterness that characterize Huck's Pap. While Pap's verbal and physical violence is improper, a feud is a proper aristocratic means of dealing with conflict. Nevertheless, despite class differences, the underlying elements are similar. Prestige and greater numbers (a family feud versus the individual tirades of Huck's Pap) only makes the behaviour of the Grangerfords and Shepherdsons more socially permissible. Prestige brings the power to continue acting like Huck's Pap, but under the guise of honour, family virtue, and tradition. There is no doubt then that the Duke and the King pursue the image of the elite and in doing so, they lay bare the artifice of prestige; they demonstrate how royalty can be a persona that is worn, rather than being an inborn trait or a marker of greater intelligence and demeanour. The Duke and the King, of course, must be punished for their impersonation, but not simply because they were unsuccessful in fooling the towns people; rather, on a larger, more philosophical scale, they have revealed the secret behind the divide between authority and subject: there is no natural quality that allows one to rule over another. If Twain is commenting on the imagined distinction between adults as somehow more well developed than children, then through the generational feud, the royals, and even the notion of slavery and racism, adults seem to neither exhibit the hard work nor the ethics that Alger, Franklin, and the Puritans championed.

The values of hard work as exclusively identifying the successful may also be inappropriate and exaggerated. Huck is lazy in some ways, but piloting a raft and embarking on his series of adventures demonstrate that Huck is perhaps more capable of work and intellectual prowess than the adults believe him to be. Unlike Rip Van Winkle who simply avoids his wife and work and service in war, Huck performs in a rebellious way, not unlike a hero rebel. Perhaps also as a comic safety valve, Huck embodies the rebellious spirit that urged Van Winkle's peers to engage in the Revolutionary War. Huck's rebellion, though, is presented as uniquely his own, as opposed to that of a war hero, who is fighting for a nation, land, or certain values. If taken satirically, Rip Van Winkle is a rebel as well, although one by chance, rather than his own design.

By sleeping through one of the most defining moments in American history, Rip Van Winkle may be pointing out the contradiction of individualism and capitalism. As an individual, Van Winkle longs to avoid work, sleep, and hang out with his friends. So, he was upholding American individualism by doing what is best for him. Also, fittingly, financial success brings the benefits that he enjoys, but Van Winkle has discovered an easier (although more shameful) route, by simply dropping out. That is, being of a higher class allows for one to sleep away his or her life, because rising up in class brings many comforts, including more leisure time for vacations, family time, trips to fancy restaurants (where one is served), hobbies, a round of golf, and so on. Recall how Benjamin Franklin has time to devote evenings to chess and language learning.[209] In contrast, people of lower classes have to spend the majority of their time simply working, and often, directly or indirectly, for higher classes. Although a non-traditional reading, as with Huck's demonstration that adults and children may not be so far apart, in some ways, Van Winkle may illustrate how the life of gossip and sleep may typify the stereotypical life of the rich, where, following Franklin, fitting in evenings of chess makes for inspirational autobiographical musings. Furthermore, if his behaviour is analogous to the rich, then Van Winkle may be interrogating qualities that transcend class; that is, he may serve as a social critique of self-serving behaviour in both the rich and the poor. Put another way, Van Winkle's lack of wealth, yet life of both laziness and leisure, shows how some rich and some poor people may, like Van Winkle, simply yearn to sleep away their lives. Making matters even more complicated, Van Winkle could also be saying that such a life is not such a bad thing; indeed, since Revolutionary War heroes are the unusual ones, then the tendency for leisure that Van Winkle depicts may be indicative of general human behaviour. These layers reveal that the comical is not simply a laughing at one identifiable target. Rather, the target in these instances is multi-faceted and layered. As a result, the target here is uncertain, possibly more appropriately described in the plural. Because of such nescience, the target has wide cultural resonance, appealing to different interpretations and varying senses of humour.

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[209] Becoming educated is a privilege that not everyone can enjoy, as is building a career in a profession one enjoys and is amply awarded both financially and through cultural status and power.

Many professional comics have an undercurrent of political commentary in their work. In "Being Foolish," Richard Ward and Shakespeare believe "The fool is by no means a fool. Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* put it perfectly: 'This fellow is wise enough to play the fool; And to do that well, craves a kind of wit'" (*Laughing* 110). For Ward, professional comics are intelligent artists, as opposed to the bumbling dolts they may play. This is not to say that comic artists are not also bumbling dolts; as the opening analysis of Thurber's "University Days," indicates, perhaps some comic artists more readily accept the less flattering side of human nature, bravely exposing themselves for the sake of urging humanity to become more humble.[210] In *The Comedian as Confidence Man*, Will Kaufman believes that many great comic artists suffer from irony fatigue, the problem of trying to balance arousing laughter and making serious social commentary. For Kaufman, artists such as Lenny Bruce and Bill Hicks become worn out or attacked/censored for the demanding job of delivering ironic play as a cover for socially dangerous criticism. Such comics are daring and brave artists who are afforded some political license, because audiences may simply believe that they are just joking or perhaps more appropriately, audiences are uncertain as to how seriously or non-seriously to interpret such comic artists. Such artists may not want to be taken as simply joking, even though they need such a guise to exist. This dilemma eventually tires out the comic artist, leading to his or her irony fatigue. Kaufman's concept is an intriguing one, but it need not be as negative as is implied. In part, the very belief in a comic's frivolousness is what gives the comic his or her political power. Hence, of greater interest for nescience, is the concept of irony fatigue as a duality that positions the comic artist as an ambiguous figure. Is the comic joking? Is the comic serious? Is the comic both? Because irony fatigue points out the ambiguous quality of the comic artist, the artist's duality (safety-valve and seriousness) may also be situated under the notion of comic nescience.[211]

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[210] This is not meant to be an over-generalization. Some comics may indeed believe that they are great, intelligent beings oozing with enviable agency. Others may perform for the sake of exhibitionism, rather than a belief in urging humans to not fall for their own ideas about their superiority over one another or all living organisms.

The notion of a comic safety valve (serious political commentary comes disguised as humour) in humour or the notion of irony fatigue (tiring of not being respected for one's serious social commentary) create perhaps too stark a division between silliness and seriousness, or mind and emotion. There is no clear gauge for measuring how much of any joke, comic text, or comedian is to be taken in good fun, with serious reflection, or condemning offence. While a joke can be identified in relatively simple terms, the reason why people laugh is multifarious, eluding easy explanation. Although it is an important concept, an incongruous shift is but one method of generating humour; moreover, crafting an incongruous sentence does not guarantee laughter.[212] Taking such mystery into account, invoking laughter is a comic text's strength and weakness. A central goal of a comic text is to be funny; indeed, this is its primary goal. Whether or not a comic text is appreciated by academics, valued as art, or understood for its political or social implications are often secondary to a comic work's defining trait: sparking laughter. Oddly, when a comic text succeeds in invoking laughter, its other elements then become both important and unimportant. If a comic text successfully generates humour, then it garners attention, which may lead to deeper analyses. Simultaneously, because it generates laughter, a comic text may be regarded as nothing more than a joke, a simply anecdotal story about one's time at university, or a parody of academic essays. Due in large part to the comic artists he chooses to analyze, what Kaufman sees as somewhat tragic is the strength and weakness of funny texts.[213] Comic texts and performances require a certain degree of nescience in terms of how they are to be received.

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[211] During one comic text or comic performance, the artist may be delivering varying levels of intended or unintended social commentary.

[212] In *The Art of Comedy Writing*, Arthur Asa Berger highlights a myriad of forty-five humour-provoking techniques. In terms of incongruity, magicians also often perform tricks that thwarts/fulfills one's pattern-seeking expectation. For instance, by making an assistant disappear, the trick thwarts the laws of known science. By being a typical trick, the magician also fulfills a certain expectation for an audience member who has some understanding of stage magic. The magician, like the comedian, may be appreciated for the skill and artistry of the performance. One difference between the magician and comedian seems to be in terms of the social life of the performed material. An audience member may applaud a trick or scramble to explain how it was done, re-positioning himself or herself into a position of knowing. The spectator of a magic show does not go home to make his or her spouse disappear, whereas the audience member of a comedian may simply steal the joke to share it during the next social gathering. The spectator of a comic show may do this for several reasons, not limited to positioning himself or herself into the role of the knowing (the punch line) narrator, or to simply have material for small talk.

Reflecting upon the uncertainty of understanding a comic text, consider Benjamin Franklin's writings once again. Commonly, Benjamin Franklin is regarded as a hardworking and intelligent individual who gained success. Like Horatio Alger has altered into a popular concept that differs from the original text, perhaps the conception of Franklin as an upstanding American overlooks the sillier side of this founding father.[214] In *The Comedian as Confidence Man*, Kaufman refers to Balzac's description of Ben Franklin: "Balzac will call him the father of three things: the lightning rod, the republic, and the hoax" (43). According to Kaufman, Franklin began his puckish writing the day after April Fool's Day, on April 2nd, 1722, in *The New-England Courant* through Silence Dogood's folksy advice and eventual attack on unsuspecting Harvard students:

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[213] This is not to say that there is not a tragic element to the position of comic artists. As evident by the cultural devaluing of comic artistry, comic artists are certainly unappreciated when compared to their more serious counterparts. Since Plato's dismissal of comic art, it seems that comic artistry has been largely marginalized as a central component of human expression. Chaplin's exile from the United States is one extreme example of how comic artists are targeted for their comic criticism; a more frequent difficulty with comedians, along with being dismissed as silly jokers, is censorship. In *Irony Fatigue*, Kaufman points out how Texas comedian Bill Hicks was the first comedian to be censored at CBS's Ed Sullivan appearance, during an appearance on the *David Letterman* late-night talk show on October 1st, 1993, because of his references to gays and lesbians, his anti-pro-life bit, and his criticism of Christian crosses: "I think it's interesting how people act on their beliefs. A lot of Christians, for instance, wear crosses around their necks. Nice sentiment, but do you think when Jesus comes back, he's really going to want to look at a cross? (*Audience laughs. Bill makes a face of pain and horror*). Ow, Maybe that's why he hasn't shown up yet. (*Audience laughs*). (*As Jesus looking down from Heaven*:) "I'm not going, Dad. No, they're still wearing crosses – they totally missed the point. When they start wearing fishes, I might go back again. . . . No, I'm not going. . . . O.K., I'll tell you what – I'll go back as a BUNNY . . . . " (*Audience bursts into applause and laughter. The band kicks into "Revolution" by the Beatles.*) " (128-129) Despite working well with the studio audience, the fear of offending the television audience led to the censoring of Hicks. Ruminating on why he was censored, Hicks supposedly said "he might have offended the odd Christian fundamentalist who couldn't see through his irony to the point of grasping his respect for an ideal meaning of Jesus, free from degrading or irrelevant associations" (129). Ultimately, however, "Hicks dismissed the importance of such possibilities: "We now live in the 'Age of Being Offended.' Get over it."" (129).

> She has so convinced you of her barnyard harmlessness that you are utterly blindsided in the fourth week, when she savages your beloved Harvard as a place where "every Beetle-Scull [seems] well satisfy'd with his own Portion of Learning," where "they learn little more than how to carry themselves handsomely, and enter a room genteely, (which might as well be acquir'd at a Dancing-School), and from where they will depart, "after Abundance of Trouble and Charge, as great Blockheads as ever, only more proud and self-conceited." You are so stung that you scribble off an angry protest to a rival newspaper over the signature "John Harvard," unaware that in all your pompousness you have been duped by a sixteen-year-old boy who is right now probably whistling as he cleans the ink off his older brother's printing press. (42)

Taken in this manner, Franklin's autobiography becomes a very different work. Kaufman refers to Gary Lindberg and Warwick Wadlington:

> Lindberg calls Franklin's *Autobiography* "one of the major how-to-do-it manuals in American history," artfully constructing a national role model made up of more or less equal parts of the self-made man, the promoter, the jack-of-all-trades, the gadgeteer, and the shrewd Yankee peddler. But it is also a milestone in one other sense: as Warwick Wadlington notes, with its deadpan narrative voice masking the sheer audacity of its claims, the *Autobiography* is the earliest major American comic work to set up an icon of

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[214] I have no sociological evidence measuring what people today think of Benjamin Franklin, but, because he is grouped with the U.S. founding fathers, there is an air of seriousness around him.

> success that simply cannot be believed, and to subvert it by calling attention to the *fact* of its incredibility. 48

Kaufman may be a bit too certain in implying that it is easy to identify Franklin's *Autobiography* as comic. On the one hand, Franklin's *Autobiography* demonstrates how, to a certain degree, self-narration is a hoax that any narrator himself or herself falls for. Memory, anecdote, diaries, and journals are, even if the author is earnest, a construction that shapes whatever is being related. On the other hand, readers cannot simply dismiss *Autobiography* as a hoax, because Ben Franklin did invent the lightning rod, was pivotal in the formation of early American political ideology, and was a highly productive individual in diverse fields. If Franklin is taken as a combination of both hard work and silliness, then a couple of observations can be made. First of all, unlike what is preached by the western mythos of success, diligence, discipline, and intelligence are not at odds with silliness, making one's self appear foolish, or fooling others through hoax and jokes. Secondly, Franklin is not simply the antithesis of, but is also a pre-cursor to Huckleberry Finn, Tom Sawyer, and other American con-comics.[215] Hard work and silliness need not be exclusive opposites. In the case of Ben Franklin, hard work and silliness may have been vibrantly complementary forces. Perhaps then, the comical can be seen as a holistic part of human identity, expression, and experience.

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[215] Kaufman points out that in terms of understanding Franklin, D.H. Lawrence, in *Studies in Classic American Literature*, "avows that he will no longer be duped: "Oh Benjamin! Oh Binjum! You do NOT suck me in any longer!" But ironically enough, Lawrence is all the *more* sucked in for earnestly taking Franklin at his word rather than allow himself to be the butt of a practical joke" (49). In contrast, Kaufman believes Mark Twain "could at least *identify* Franklin's comic challenge, if not appreciate it. He thought the *Autobiography* "pernicious," but he obviously recognized Franklin's capacity for outlandish exaggeration. He implied as much in his treatment of Franklin's famous boast of having arrived in Philadelphia "with nothing in the world but two shillings in his pocket and four rolls of bread under his arm. But really, when you come to examine it critically, it was nothing. Anybody could have done it"" (51). Kaufman's reading of Lawrence's and Twain's understanding of Franklin further complicates matters. Perhaps Lawrence was genuinely offended and thus his attack is earnest, but it is possible that Lawrence plays along, responding in an exaggerated manner suitable for the comic trickery of Franklin. Similarly, perhaps Twain saw Franklin's artistry as simplistic, the use of exaggeration and hoax. In a way, it is easier and safer to be funny through a hoax, because the comic surprise is more hidden; a hoax is a type of pre-emptive strike in humour, where the receiver of the hoax is in the dark, so the receiver cannot suspect anything is awry. Twain's work presents itself as humour, so the toughest critic is challenged to laugh and thus, Twain has a more difficult job than Franklin. However, Twain also could be playing the Franklin game. By claiming anyone could have done what Franklin did, Twain has learned his lessons about hard work from Franklin rather well.

The Alger myth is popularly identified as a success story, which is the basis of the American dream. Although powerful as a causal equation for success, Alger's own stories and contemporary stories include chance elements, such as patronage or lucky opportunities. While certain characters in American literature, such as Rip Van Winkle and Benjamin Franklin may be easily identified as a lazy loser and an enterprising winner, respectively, the perspective of comic nescience allows for an appreciation of alternative readings, which comically complicate the ideal of the self-made individual.

> Slaves built all this shit down in here or carried the shit that built it. Right, I
> looked at the Mississippi, I said, "Motherfucker had to walk across that."
> "Get your black ass on there and walk. Carry that tree."
> Y'all some cold motherfuckers. Your ancestors.
> (Richard Pryor, "Slavery," *Here and Now*)

III. Imperialism, Racism, Social Darwinism, and Cultural Prestige

A direct association between an individual's character and his or her status in life takes one of its most damaging inspirations from racism. Another possible root of North American attitudes to success stems from the sixteenth century, during which time European nations were beginning imperial expansion, and when race began to be developed as a pseudo-scientific category and excuse for cultural domination. In strict scientific terms today, there is only one human race, but because of the politics of the imperial age, race became a convenient means to create a Euro-centric hierarchy of the world's peoples. In particular, the pseudo-science of race research came to justify the exploitation of the colonized by the colonizer; racism became a type of propaganda benefiting the abuses of those in power. Such propaganda did not begin outside of European borders, however. For instance, the Welsh, Irish, and Scottish were considered less intellectually evolved than their ruling British counterparts.[216] Nevertheless, the greater force of racist ideology globally has been forged by beliefs that those of darker skin colour should be ruled over by those with lighter skin.

A race-based (or gender-biased) hierarchy fits in well with the medieval concept of The Great Chain of Being, a visual symbol claiming a universal hierarchy of all forms of life, with God at the very top, followed by angels, royalty, aristocracy, commoners, animals and so on. It is no surprise then, that in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, that Bottom quite literally becomes an ass; with the head of a donkey, Bottom personifies the animal qualities of the human. In The Great Chain of Being, the king was closest to God, and thus considered to have a divine right to rule. While the upper half of the human chain was progressively closer to divinity, the lower half was closer to the animal realm, lacking the divinity of society's elite. Everyone in society had his or her particular ring along the chain that defined his or her status. Such hierarchical thinking is longstanding, evident from Plato, through The Great Chain of Being, and then with Social Darwinism.

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[216] Nancy Stepan's *The Idea of Race in Science* explores the history of racist ideology in Great Britain during the 19th and 20th century. The very notion of race was up for debate between the polygenists, who believed in unequal, and thus hierarchical, relations between different races, while the monogenists argued for the existence of one human race. Stepan claims "the story of racial science in Britain between 1800 and 1850 is the story of desperate attempts to refuse polygenism and the eventual acceptance of popular quasi-polygenist prejudices in the language of science" (30). The influence of polygenist theories goes far beyond the field of science, however. For instance, the use of the term race in everyday North American English points to how the polygenist perspective in a sense also won the debate for the average individual. "Race" continues to serve as a convenient term to identify people of different gradients of skin colour and features, especially facial. So, it seems that the polygenists won the debate not necessarily because their science was more conclusive the monogenists, but because the view justified the political power of certain groups and because polygenist views fit into longstanding and unquestioned notions of the division of the world's people. For instance, despite its valuing of democracy, ancient Greek society not only distinguished between Greeks and Barbarians, but also between different types of Greeks, evident in the struggles between the varying Greek city-states, and within Greek society, with the hierarchy of men over women, slaves, and foreigners. From the ancient Greek model, there is an "insider" versus "outsider" conception of relations. When it comes to competition, those who win may be said to have made it into an elite group or to have simply "made it." In others words, one moves from being an outsider to being an insider, from one of the undistinguished mass to the laudable, successful individual. While there may be nothing inherently wrong with wanting to be the best in a group of competitors (in fact, such competitive environments may even push individuals beyond their limits, serving as great and quite possibly necessary motivation), the emphasis here is to highlight one significant way, culturally, success and competition have been conceived.

Coupled with Social Darwinism and racism, material and social success was never as simple as Alger's equation. Charles Darwin's theory of natural selection and evolutionary theory within the realm of biology is applied (or rather misapplied) to the social realm, where it is known as Social Darwinism during the nineteenth century. Social Darwinism fit in well with prevailing class and race biases during the time, and was used as another justification of one's social status.[217] Interestingly, as Europe moves away from religious justifications of social division towards pseudo-scientific justifications, the reliance upon a class-based Euro-centric hierarchy remains the same. Although Social Darwinism has more room for hard work and merit than The Great Chain of Being, the Social Darwinist model retains a sense of natural ability or inability. Someone of a lower class was not as naturally capable as someone of higher status was. Although there is a disparity between a theory's function in biology and a theory's function in sociology, Social Darwinism, nonetheless, becomes a popular rationalization for class bias and race hatred. Unfortunately, some of this bias continues to be popular today, through stereotyping, sexism, and racism.[218]

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[217] For instance, the slogan "survival of the fittest" signals a common misconception of the way competition within the natural world was conceived by Darwin. In *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be*, Walter Truett Anderson explains Darwin's theory in the following manner: "Although Darwin's theory of evolution is sometimes described as "survival of the fittest," natural selection does not necessarily call forth the perfectly fit species; it only eliminates the unfit. Darwinian evolution is (as Gregory Bateson once put it) based on the principle of constraints, not on the principle of cause and effect" (71). However, in common or the layperson's parlance, "survival of the fittest" signifies an individual's agency, a causal connection between skill, performance, and success, which highlights how a scientific theory becomes appropriated by prevailing social justifications of power and accomplishment.

Indeed, it can be argued that the current state of the world's economy has little to do with a level-playing field, where the hardest working individuals gain material and social success. Historically, slavery, imperialism, genocide, amongst other forms of destructive behavior, helped forge the wealth of contemporary economic leaders; the hard work of the slave did not lead to material and social success, or spiritual election.[219]

In terms of literature, Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* is a landmark novel that, since its publication in 1719, resonates throughout popular culture for its championing of individualism, enterprise, and gaining power.[220] Early in the novel, Crusoe's status is clearly established, as illustrated by his father's advice:

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[218] Worse, conventionally, even success by a member of a stereotyped group may be reduced to natural ability, rather than individual hard work or merit. For instance, consider the prevailing stereotype that African-Americans are naturally better basketball players; simply put, if an African-American is good at basketball, it is because he is African-American, whereas a comparable white basketball player's abilities may not be reduced to his skin colour or ethnic heritage. Such African-American stereotyping is damaging within the Alger mythology, because it erases the effort and identity of the individual, in favour of racist ideology. Alger's hero was an individual who worked hard and displayed a moral strength of character that carved a path to success. Reducing an individual basketball player's success to natural ability is another way to say that the African-American player has an unfair advantage. The African-American player's success is not his own; rather, for him, it is a matter of genetics or some pseudo-scientific prejudicial view of the way genetics works. Successful white athletes do not have such stereotyping; rather, they are routinely championed for their hard work and determination, as mythologized in Hollywood sports films of successful white athletes. Moreover, if there is stereotyping of white athletes, then it ties into a differentiation between intelligence and physicality. For instance, a longstanding bias in American football has been that white players are better at being quarterbacks, because they are naturally smarter, whereas the more physical positions are better suited for black players. Here, we may have a throwback to the division between those destined to rule and those destined to serve, or between those closer to the divine and those closer to the animal world. An awareness of the roots of such biases may help individuals realize that such racist designations are not natural at all, but are justifications of the power of those who rule. Fittingly, in *Roma Rights*, Claude Cahn says "the human rights idea is not about certain groups – it is about the treatment of individuals" (18). Avoiding the hasty generalization of racism requires the respectful acknowledgment of an individual's uniqueness.

[219] In relation to stable economic power, many of the world's top universities are located in countries or regions that have a historically high level of sustained wealth. For instance, according to the Academic Ranking of World Universities – 2005 (http://ed.sjtu.edu.cn/ranking.htm), the top ten universities are located in the United States and the United Kingdom. (This academic ranking is from the Institute of Higher Education, Shanghai Jiao Tong University). Specifically, from the following link, http://ed.sjtu.edu.cn/rank/2005/ARWU2005_Top100.htm, the rankings are: (1) Harvard; (2) Cambridge; (3) Stanford; (4) University of California – Berkeley; (5) Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT); (6) California Institute of Technology; (7) Columbia; (8) Princeton; (9) University of Chicago; (10) Oxford.

> He told me it was men of desperate fortunes on one hand, or of aspiring, superior fortunes on the other, who went abroad upon adventures, to rise by enterprise, and make themselves famous in undertakings of a nature out of the common road; that these things were all either too far above me or too far below me; that mine was the middle state, or what might be called the upper station of low life, which he had found, by long experience, was the best state in the world, the most suited to human happiness, not exposed to the miseries and hardships, the labour and sufferings of the mechanic part of mankind, and not embarrassed with the pride, luxury, ambition, and envy of the upper part of mankind.
> (http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/521)

Being the individualist he is, Crusoe rebels.[221] In the October 2000 issue of *Bright Lights Film Journal*, in "Robinson Crusoe and the Ethnic Sidekick," Frederick Zackel considers Crusoe as a new type of self-defined hero, because of the use of first person narration (http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/30/crusoe4.html). Unlike the ancient Greek epics, where Homer is the source and a muse is inspiration, Robinson Crusoe is, in a sense, his own maker. He is the narrative authority of his adventures, establishing his own Eden, rather than simply trying to re-enter the Eden he left behind. Crusoe is the supposed author of the text, not Defoe; indeed, the text mimics the style of non-fictional journal entries. As a result, this confusion between author and his creation helps make Crusoe more of an imagined ideal. Crusoe becomes a cultural force in his own right, not as simply another fictional creation, but as a type of actual man, an intelligent risk-taking adventurer. Crusoe is valued for his resourcefulness and ingenuity, values that become especially significant in the burgeoning capitalist system, where new ideas or new spins on old ideas, promise profit.[222] Crusoe's status as a lone figure cannot be overstated; he is, although indirectly working for the ideal of an enterprising spirit, rather alone and in that regard, is working by and for himself. In "Robinson Crusoe," Zackel agrees:

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[220] For instance, the recent television game show *Survivor* builds upon the shipwrecked theme of *Robinson Crusoe*. Before this series, there have been numerous film and television variations of the story. The concept itself has also inspired other literature, such as William Golding's *Lord of the Flies*. The concept of being lost at sea may itself date as far back as Homer's *Odyssey*.

[221] Although *Robinson Crusoe* is an English-language text written by an English novelist, the enterprising individualism ties in well with the burgeoning ideals of the American character. It is especially relevant when one considers that there is a growth of slavery during the eighteenth century. Also, ever since the Bible, the rebellious child seems to be one proven artistic way to be either thrust out of an otherwise quality home or to embark on journeys, or perhaps both.

> Robinson Crusoe is not a classical or traditional hero. Those early heroes defended their society against outside threats, or saved those whose lives were in danger. Crusoe is no epic hero. He is a more self-centered, self-absorbed individual. He lives alone on a desert island. Only after two decades alone does Crusoe discover and rescue Man Friday. (http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/30/crusoe4.html)

Zackel is partly correct. Crusoe was serving himself, but this is a core value of the new society, the society of the individual. Individualism and self-determination are contradictions evident in both British Imperialism and American slavery. With Imperialism, European powers clamoured to seize the natural resources of their colonies, for their own right as individual, enterprising powers, but they did so by enslaving nations, taking away the "independence" of the colonized. Such a contradiction would become especially evident during the World Wars, when powers such as Britain argued that Germany has no right to take away another nation's independence, while Britain itself boasted a vast empire of colonies. With American slavery, in *A People & A Nation*,

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[222] Demonstrating its vast appeal and huge multi-national success, in "Robinson Crusoe," Zackel says: "*Robinson Crusoe* was an immensely popular story to the European colonial mentality. It went to four editions within the first four months, spawned two mediocre sequels, and then went on to be published in over 700 editions throughout Europe and America within a century. The novel has never been out of print" (http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/30/crusoe4.html).

Mary Beth Norton et al point out a similar contradiction: "Revolutionary ideology exposed one of the primary contradictions in American society. Both blacks and whites saw the irony in slaveholding Americans' claims that one of their aims in taking up arms was to prevent Britain from 'enslaving' them" (164). In "To Corroborate Our Claims," Peter A. Dorsey points out how slavery in American Revolutionary discourse was a crucial and fluid concept that had a major impact on the way early Americans thought about their political future as well as the future of chattel slavery. Operating on the beliefs and emotions surrounding the political debates, the slavery metaphor destabilized previously accepted categories of thought about politics, race, and the early republic" (*American Quarterly*, 355). Being a fluid concept then, dependent in large part on its political use by figures on either side of the slavery issue, abolitionists could mine the rhetoric of early Revolutionaries to position slavery as fundamentally anti-American. Demonstrating the contradictions of slavery and freedom, perhaps because it was less a declaration of individual ingenuity than an example of self-serving Euro-centrism, Crusoe's desire for "self-reliance," through his agency, genius, and mastery over nature, includes mastery over another's self, the darker-skinned companion.[223]

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[223] On this point, one needs to be careful regarding the contemporary binary between black and white and Dafoe's treatment of European and non-European encounters. During the time of *Robinson Crusoe*, the notion of black and white or European and non-European were not as well established as they are today; rather, they were emergent concepts. Possibly, with the growth of the European Union, such concepts will be further modified. In the 1995 *ELH* article, "'My Savage,' 'My Man,'" Roxanne Wheeler points out how it is a common mistake to blur the distinction between contemporary notions of race, racism, civilization, and savage with earlier notions of such concepts. Hence, Wheeler argues "not only that the color binary of black and white is an inadequate tool for understanding either the representation of race or colonial relations, but also that significant racialized categories other than skin color, such as "savage," "Christian," and "slave," complicate an understanding of race at this time" (821). Wheeler, for instance, points out, agreeing with Toni Morrison, "Friday is taught to be like a white man, and a certain kind of white man -- a servant" (823). Critiquing Morrison's association of Crusoe and Friday to the Clarence Thomas and Anita Hill hearings, Wheeler clarifies: "in the novel, Friday is neither "black," "stupid," nor considered "biologically handicapped." Such stereotypical features are enabled by a peculiarly nineteenth-century racism and a North American, post-Civil Rights critique of the construction of race; they are also a measure of the power of black power to act as proxy for all other oppressed groups" (824). As with the success

An unequal partnership comes to typify subsequent white and non-white partnerships in North American literary and then popular culture; the relationship itself builds upon a contradictory embodiment of freedom. Note how the following lines from Defoe's *Robinson* assert Crusoe's resolve and declaration of independence:

> All the good counsels of my parents, my father's tears and my mother's entreaties, came now fresh into my mind; and my conscience, which was not yet come to the pitch of hardness to which it has since, reproached me with the contempt of advice, and the breach of my duty to God and my father. (http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/521)

In these lines, one can find a repeated contradiction of certain heroes, like Crusoe. While they themselves may spark the narrative or significant moments in the narrative because of their desire for independence and often rebellion, later, they demonstrate, in its most extreme forms, a master and servant type of relationship.

According to Zackel, in "Robinson Crusoe," Crusoe's example is especially suitable for capitalism. As opposed to magically earning his wealth, like heroes of folk and fairy tales, Zackel explains that Crusoe's value on hard work alters the way wealth can be attained, namely, making it more of a possibility for any capable individual. Zackel, however, points out:

> In truth, Crusoe got rich by entering a natural paradise and being the sole proprietor. He does not begin from scratch. The island is rich, has no owners, and needs improvement. The shipwreck that stranded Crusoe there leaves him as the sole survivor and, more importantly, the sole owner of its treasures. (http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/30/crusoe4.html)

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mythos with emphasizes causal agency over chance, race and racism have come to denote a binary hierarchy between those of lighter versus those of darker skin, however, both the Alger mythos and racism functions in a more varied fashion in differing time periods and cultural frameworks.

Unlike past quests where the journey led to or chanced upon a cave of riches or an El Dorado, Crusoe is an imperialistic businessman. As Zackel wants to emphasis him, Crusoe is the typical self-serving individualist who is more interested in manipulation to achieve his or her own power, security, status and achievement, than to act in a socially, culturally, and environmentally responsible manner.

For Zackel, the Imperialist island of Crusoe becomes a new myth for capitalism. Referring to Sylvia Wynter, Zackel explains:

> In her 1976 essay "Ethno or Socio Poetics," Sylvia Wynter points out a strong, and I believe accurate, explanation for the profound (and lasting) effects Crusoe's language made on the Western imagination. She says: "By calling the Indian 'Friday' Crusoe negates his former name, the meaning of his former culture, its architecture of significance. With the past, the cultural world of Friday wiped out, he is reduced to his role as Crusoe's servant." Not only does this metamorphosis change Friday, it changes Crusoe. "Before he had the power to name things, now he had the power to 'name other men.'" This power comes from Crusoe's gun. As Wynter writes: "Friday, seeing the ease with which the gun has wiped out his at once fellow / and enemy Indians . . . prays to the Gun, pleading that it does not harm him." Wynter is right when she notes, "The gun makes Crusoe a MAN, since he owns it, and Friday a native, since he is without it. Men are masters; natives are servants.'"
> I contend the myth of Crusoe has become institutionalized as the cornerstone of our Western culture. That its influences has reverberated across two and a half centuries like the tectonic ripples of a California earthquake. (http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/30/crusoe2.html)

Zackel demonstrates those ripples through western literary and popular culture, spawning sympathetic imitations in *The Swiss Family Robinson* by Johann David Wyss, or *The Last* *of the Mochicans* by James Fenimore Cooper, as well as more critical treatments in *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens and *Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain.[224]

Even though *Robinson Crusoe* is the work of an English novelist and thus it may not seem relevant, on the grounds of national origins, to be applicable to the United States, evidence from the text's influence in America proves that the *Robinson* phenomenon is more than simply English.[225] While *Lost in Space* (premiering in 1969) was a popular American television version of the theme, more recently, Hollywood has provided further variations in *Cast Away* and *Terminal*, both starring Tom Hanks, although *Cast Away* replaces the island companion with a (possibly more politically correct) volleyball and *Terminal* makes the stranded individual, although European, a

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[224] In particular, Zackel points out several instances of the ethnic partnership, which often involves an undertone of master and servant. The texts Zackel mentions include the following: *48 Hrs*, *Lethal Weapon* (series of films), *The Matrix*, the *I Spy* television series, *The Green Mile*, *Bladerunner*, *Ghostbusters* (series of films), *Three Kings*, *Tin Cup*, and *Out of Sight*, amongst others. Although Zackel's point is understood, when viewed more closely, the relationships Zackel mentions vary and are not entirely master-servant or derogatory. In *48 Hrs*, a young black male is in the custody of an older white male, but they come to respect one another; moreover, Nick Nolte and Eddie Murphy made a good comedy team. In *Lethal Weapon*, a black male is an older, family-centred man, interested in retiring, partnered with a younger, white male who is suicidal. Here as well, Danny Glover and Mel Gibson make for a good action-comedy team. In addition, Glover reigns in the wilder Gibson; at times, then, Glover is almost like an older brother or father-figure to Gibson. In *The Matrix*, an older black male is mentor to a young white male. In *The Green Mile*, a white male prison guard befriends an innocent black male inmate with magical healing powers. In *Bladerunner*, a white cop has a Mexican-American partner, whose role is rather minor. In *Ghostbusters*, the black character is a minor figure and the only non-comedian of the group. In *Three Kings*, the black character is more than a sidekick, when one considers the actor's star status; that is, rapper Ice Cube is a hip hop artist, whose star status rivals that of several other white actors in the film. In *Tin Cup*, the ethnic sidekick is Cheech Marin, but he is a veteran of partnerships, dating back to his partnership with Tommy Chong and his partnership with Don Johnson on the television series *Nash Bridges*. *Out of Sight* includes Jennifer Lopez as George Clooney's Latino love interest and Don Cheadle as Clooney's crime partner. While Clooney is the mastermind, in a sense, the stock role of the criminal leader need not automatically signal a racist master-servant relationship. Within the American context, a race-centred reading is important, but there is more at work than race and everything is not necessarily negative.

[225] As with many other popular novels, films, and television series, *Robinson Crusoe* also may not be limited to only the English-language, considering that many popular texts are translated into many different languages. For a contemporary example, consider how the American Broadcasting Corporation's (ABC) television hit *Desperate Housewives* is the most popular television program in the world, being broadcast in many different languages. While an argument can be made that audiences solely identify the series as American and English-language (or more appropriately, American-language) programming, it is highly possible that audiences from different linguistic, cultural, religious, and social spheres understand *Desperate Housewives* as not simply American.

European from a post-Soviet nation with a trio of ethnic minority helpers in the form of airport terminal support staff. The stranded individual also exists in fugitive chase narratives, which consist of a protagonist on the run from pursuing authorities of some sort. The television series and film *The Fugitive* is one such example, as is the David Morrell novel and Ted Kotcheff film, *Rambo: First Blood*, with John J. Rambo hiding out in the mountains from corrupt police officers.[226] The Michael Blake novel and Kevin Costner film *Dances with Wolves* provides yet another variation of the stranded individual. Sharing first names with Rambo, Lieutenant John J. Dunbar eventually befriends the Comanche.[227] Currently, *Robinson Crusoe* is a hit game show, *Survivor* – now, that is American.

In *I Started Out as a Child*, subverting the master and servant relationship, Bill Cosby gives a voice of protest to both Tonto and Silver in his bit "The Lone Ranger"[228]:

> There was one guy that I always worried about and that was the Lone Ranger's buddy Tonto. Now Tonto to me always was like, I would say to Tonto, why does he do the same thing, because the Lone Ranger would say, "Tonto"
> Tonto: "Yes Kimosabe"

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[226] In *The Fugitive*, Dr. Richard Kimble is on a quest against the authority of the justice system. Like Rambo, Dr. Kimble works to exonerate the charges against him and discover his wife's true murderer. In terms of a Canadian link, the American hero Rambo is based on the 1972 novel *First Blood* by Canadian author, David Morrell.

[227] Since Dunbar adopts Comanche culture, a case could be made that the text upholds the appropriation of Native American culture. However, another, more generous, reading could allow the friendship between Dunbar and the Comanches. Historically, it may have been possible for a white American to life alongside a Native American; so, the text may be entertaining that possibility. Especially when one considers the backdrop of the Civil War and the fact that Dunbar is a Union solider, the text can be taken as demonstrating a possibility of intercultural peace between two historically opposed groups.

[228] *The Lone Ranger* is based on a character created by George W. Trendle, which was developed by script writer Fran Striker. First airing in 1933, the radio series that Cosby refers too continued for well over two thousand episodes, until the series went off the airwaves in 1954. Ranger Reid and his childhood friend Tonto, along with their horses Silver and Scout, populate the adventures. A highly popular television series starring Clayton Moore and Jay Silverheels aired from 1949 to 1957, as did a spin-off radio and television series *The Green Hornet*, with the grand nephew of the Lone Ranger Britt Reid and his sidekick Kato. *The Lone Ranger* may itself be inspired by the adventure stories of mid to late nineteenth century German writer Karl May. Karl May's wise Apache chief Winnetou and his white blood brother Old Shatterhand engaged in a series of adventures set in the American West. Karl May also created Kara Ben Nemsi and his servant Hadschi Halef Omar as similar adventurers traversing the Sahara Dessert and Near East.

> Lone Ranger: "I want you to go to town."
> And every time he'd go to town, the bandits would beat the snot out of him. They'd get him.
> Bandits: "Nice to have you in town Tonto." (Fighting noises and gunshots).
> And he'd go back and the Lone Ranger would look at him, "Oh my goodness, Tonto, did you get the information."
> Tonto: "Yes, me have information."
> You know, that kind of thing, and I'd always holler to the radio, Tonto, don't go to town! They're gonna beat you up again, man.
> You know, just one time, "Tonto,"
> Tonto: "Yes Kimosabe."
> Lone Ranger: "You go to town."
> Tonto: "You go to Hell."
> Lone Ranger: "I want you to get the information."
> Tonto: "What is information? Information say Tonto no go to town. That's what information say."

Bill Cosby himself played an ethnic sidekick of sorts in the first American television series to grant both a white actor (Robert Culp) and a black actor equal billing, adding further relevance to his routine. The expendable ethnic is a stock concept in mainstream films; that is, the ethnic character is killed off early within a film or is otherwise marginalized throughout the narrative. Of course, Tonto does not protest the requests of the Lone Ranger, but doing so, as Cosby illustrates, reveals two things. One, although Tonto's role is marginal, when he refuses to help the Lone Ranger, the narrative momentum halts. Without the information, the Lone Ranger cannot fulfill his heroic function of capturing the bandits. Pointing out the way master and servant relations function, after imagining an incident where the Lone Ranger and Tonto become drunk (because the town has no violence), Cosby ends the routine by having Silver revolt against the Lone Ranger as well:

> Town's Person: "Masked man, the bandits have an eight mile lead."

> Lone Ranger: "Don't worry about a thing." Jump on us. "Hi-Yo, Silver . . ."
> Silver: "Wait a minute! Are you crazy? Get off my back!"
> Lone Ranger: "What's a matter with you, Silver?
> Silver: "Don't worry about Silver. I'm sick of this. How much of a lead have they got this time, eight, ten, thirty-five miles? You know how embarrassing it is to come back in that stable and have those old snotty horses say, "Oh Boy, Did you catch them this time?" "No, I didn't, I didn't catch them." I'm sick of this! Look at these shin bones of scars on my shins from when we catch up with those nuts and they run out of bullets and every time they throw the gun back at you, they don't hit you, do they? No -- Knock, Knock, Knock! -- right off of Old Silver's shins!"

By beginning the routine with Tonto's revolt and ending with Silver's, Cosby associates the ethnic sidekick with the animal helper. The Lone Ranger, despite his reputation as a great hero and expert marksman, does not achieve success by his agency alone; rather, he is highly dependent upon the help of Tonto and Silver, as well as the cultural mechanisms which allow for Tonto to simply follow orders, not unlike a horse.

Aside from the continued popularity of Defoe's premise of the stranded individual in Hollywood as well as the dramatic and comic treatments of the ethnic sidekick, the very concept of entering an "uninhabited" space and turning it into success may be closer to a contemporary American vision of itself than a British one.[229] The rise of post-colonialism critiques the negative legacy of British imperialism; also, while imperialism is an important part of English identity and history, the English can look further back to the legends of King Arthur and folk stories of Robin Hood. However, being a younger nation than England, America seems to have seized upon the notion of the New World as an "uninhabited" or "uncivilized" island waiting to be lifted up by Puritan enterprise. The myth of the west as a frontier of opportunity and of the United States as a land where dreams are realized seems more valid a parallel to Crusoe's island than does contemporary England.[230] While England also is a land of opportunity for immigrants, the rebel entrepreneur seems too crude an image for England, where the presence of a Queen still places a great deal of value on, if only ceremonially, the respect of hierarchal authority. Socially, accent may mark class more so in England than it does in the United States, where almost obsessively, popular texts reiterate the value of the rebel individual, ingenuity, and success.[231]

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[229] In early nineteenth century America, James Fenimore Cooper created his Leatherstocking series of five novels, which tell the life story of Natty Bumppo (or Hawkeye). The second novel, *The Last of the Mohicans* is considered the most well known of the series. According to *Highlights in American Literature*, "The creation of the character of Natty Bumppo is probably the most significant thing that happened in American literature during the first 50 years of its history. Like Sir Walter Scott and other romantic writers who dealt with historical or legendary characters, Cooper, in his tales about Bumppo, unfolded an epic account. Bumppo, a frontiersman whose actions were shaped by the forest in which he lived, seems to be related in some way to the deepest meaning of the American experience itself" (22). In terms of the cross-cultural friendship, *Highlights in American Literature* says, "His friendship with Chingachgook is symbolic of Hawkeye's understanding of the differences that exist between peoples. (Chingachgook symbolizes the aboriginal life and culture of America.) The friendship between the two men, which runs through all five Leatherstocking Tales, is one of the great friendships of literature, and it exists because of, not in spite of, their contrasting differences" (23). Taking a less hostile attitude towards Cooper's Leatherstocking Tales demonstrates how the series, despite its stereotyping, in the political

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context of American genocide and slavery, demonstrates some attempt to treat the native population in a less than wholly demonizing fashion. The noble savage image, however, is one that will continue until well into the twentieth century, with Robert Flaherty's *Nanook of the North.*

[230] Frederick Jackson Turner's *The Frontier in American History* builds upon his influential essay, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," which was first delivered in 1893 Chicago for the American Historical Association, and served as the foundation of American frontier studies. Turner's concept unifies tendencies in American historical migration and cultural expression. In 1955, R.W.B. Lewis publishes *American Adam: Innocence, Tragedy, and Tradition in the Nineteenth Century*, which charts the Edenic myth in nineteenth century American writing. Many mainstream fictional films adopt a tripartite pattern of order, chaos, and order restored, marking the beginning, middle, and end of a cinematic narrative. The attempt to establish and re-establish a utopia seems to re-emerge in popular American narratives.

[231] The United States does have distinct regional differences in terms of accent, with, for instance, the Southern U.S. accent, the Texan accent, and the New England accent. In terms of popular icons of individualism, John Wayne and Clint Eastwood have made their careers out of playing the rebel hero. The value of ingenuity can be seen in the way American advertising tends to emphasis a continually forward momentum with superlatives proclaiming, "the new and improved" and other "sound-bites" of progress. (If something is new, then how can it be improved?) As for material success, along with the popularity of Donald Trump's (and the National Broadcasting Corporation's) reality game show *The Apprentice*, popular hip hop stars often brag about both their physical and financial prowess, demonstrating how they have achieved the American Dream.

Crusoe's travelogue can be viewed as an inspiration for comic variations of the enterprising traveler, especially in Voltaire's *Candide* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels*. Although less explicitly a travelogue on the global scale, Mark Twain's *Huck Finn* addresses the master and servant relationships, than *Robinson Crusoe* and *The Leatherstocking Tales*, through Huck and Jim.[232] Just as values of agency, individualism, and capitalism cannot be restricted to Dafoe's originating country, the humorous critique of such values also is not restricted to the Old World of Swift and Voltaire. Notoriously, while *Crusoe* and *The Leatherstocking* series efface their troubling racism, *Huck Finn* brings it to the fore, with its repeated, excessive, and supposedly documentary use of the term *nigger.*[233]

Neither Defoe nor Cooper refer to their chief ethnic characters in such an openly derogatory manner, at least not in a single and culturally-grounded epithet that comes to mark the problem and the power of the Twain's work.[234] Early in the text, the prejudice against Jim's humanity is clear when, referring to encountering an educated and free black man, Huck's Pap spews the following monologue:

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[232] In "Robinson Crusoe," referring to *The Leatherstocking Tales* Zackel says, "Mark Twain wrote an essay ridiculing them, then turned around and wrote a parody of Crusoe and his Ethnic Sidekick wandering in the American wilderness, this one featuring a white kid and a black slave on a raft on the Mississippi River. To see that *Huckleberry Finn* is a parody, one need only realize that Nigger Jim is going south with Huck to find freedom" (http://www.brightlightsfilm.com/30/crusoe4.html).

[233] Roughly, Twain uses the term (or variations of it) around two hundred times. For contemporary mainstream North American audiences, *nigger* is a clearly offensive term. However, the ease of its use by various characters in the novel serves as a possible indicator of how common the term was during Twain's lifetime; moreover, those who use it in the novel are not all explicitly racist, pointing to how racism may be at its most pervasive when its users do not consider it to be a derogatory term. Indeed, today, racist attitudes exist, but they may not be acknowledged as such for current generations, because such attitudes are seemingly so common. It may be easier for audiences and scholars to identify racism of past texts and authors, than it is to identify the racism in their own beliefs, attitudes, and texts.

[234] Crusoe's naming of "Friday" takes on some circulation in the culture, but only after Dafoe's work, whereas nigger was a term in use during the release of *Huckleberry Finn*. The term's origins are unclear, but it seems to have first gained wide circulation through colonialists, who would use nigger to refer to the darker-skinned inhabitants of the colonized nation. In America specifically, lighter-skinned slave-owners would refer to darker-skinned slaves as niggers; hence, in America, nigger becomes especially associated with the African-American community, while its general use to refer to people of darker skin falls away. However, within some circles, hybrid terms also exist, such as sand nigger (for Arabs), rice nigger (for Asians), and snow nigger (for the Inuit).

> He had the whitest shirt on you ever see, too, and the shiniest hat; and there ain't a man in that town that's got as fine clothes as what he had; and he had a gold watch and chain, and a silver-headed cane – the awfulest old gray-headed nabob in the State. And what do you think? they said he was a p'fessor in a college, and could talk all kinds of languages, and knowed everything. And that ain't the wust. They said he could *vote*, when he was at home. Well, that let me out. Thinks I, what is the country a-coming to? It was 'lection day, and I was just about to go and vote, myself, if I warn't too drunk to get there; but when they told me there was a State in this country where they'd let that nigger vote, I drawed out. I says I'll never vote agin. (*Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 39)

The existence of a black man who is a well-dressed professor overturns the cultural hierarchy that claims a natural order based upon the amount of melanin in the skin.[235] The professor, according to the editorial notes of Thomas Cooley refers to an actual individual, Dr. John C. Mitchell, adding greater weight to the rant (*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 39). The weight works in at least two simultaneous ways. One, it can be a direct attack on Mitchell, serving as a cathartic outlet for racist jealousy. Two, since the speech comes from an abusive drunk, the speech reduces the racism against Mitchell – assuming there was some real-world racism – to the ramblings of an uneducated, violent, alcoholic. Making Huck's Pap the mouthpiece for racism is a major critique of racist discourse. An inversion of a derogatory real-world reference, the reference here warrants the reader's sympathy, instead of judgment and ridicule. In this case, assuming one does not sympathize with such feelings, Huck's Pap, the deliverer of the ridicule, can be taken as a lowly figure, rather than the target of his rant. The difficulty, of course, is assuming that every reader responds in the same manner. Huck's Pap can also be regarded as a cathartic voice, releasing some level of fear regarding the burgeoning cultural status of an African-American. Also, one may even identify with Huck's Pap, making his outburst somewhat comic and tragic. Comic because of the insults ("nabob") and exaggeration ("knowed everything") and somewhat tragic because of the sense that America is somehow no longer being the ideal, the frontier of finance or the Eden of opportunity for the white patriarch that Frederick Jackson Turner and R.W.B. Lewis refer to.

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[235] Huck's pap stresses how the professor is a lighter-skinned black, which draws attention to a key, if possibly ignored element in Twain's time, of the history of slavery in America. Notoriously, white slave masters often raped or, less violently, had affairs with their slaves. Race and racism, in part, constitute a social rule dictating who is allowed to have children with one another. Here, as a visual joke, racism become particularly troublesome to handle if a black man is, in terms of skin colour, rather white. So, more is at issue than colour. A further difficulty for the professor is that regardless of what he achieves in terms of upward mobility, for many, he will always be an object of ridicule, and thus his reputation will be blackened or ridiculed by individuals such as Huck's pap.

The agency and enterprise of Crusoe and Hawkeye are inverted into the obsessive, controlling, and vicious pap. Earlier in the book, in Chapter V, the white color that is a sign of prestige in the shirt of the Mitchell-inspired reference is depicted as a sickness: "There warn't no color in his face, where his face showed; it was white; not like another man's white, but a white to make a body sick, a white to make a body's flesh crawl – a tree-toad white, a fish-belly white" (31). Pap's violence stems both from his alcoholism and greed. It is not simply liquor that motivates Pap, but like his "enterprising" forebears, pap is drunk on power. His greed is relevant not only in his jealousy of the black professor, but also in the interest Pap has in Huck's money: "I heard about it away down the river, too. That's why I come. You git me that money tomorrow – I want it" (33). Pap and Huck can be seen in a slave-master and slave relationship: "He said he'd cowhide me till I was black and blue if I didn't raise some money for him . . .

But he said *he* was satisfied; said he was boss of his son . . ." (33). The most explicit representation of Pap's cruelty comes in his performance of slave master, beating his property, Huck: "But by and by pap got too handy with his hick'ry, and I couldn't stand it. I was all over welts" (37). It is here in the picaresque novel that *Huck Finn* asks audiences to relate to the plight of the slave through that of the abused child. Like a slave desiring freedom, Huck fakes his own death, symbolically escaping the ownership of his owner/patriarch, and toppling the hierarchy upon which it claims its power. In this way, as though Friday can give up his name, Huck can re-create his identity, all the while, demonstrating the social construction of, rather than the natural origins of, identity. More than making a name for himself in the financial sense of Crusoe, Huck's quest is quite literally re-investing his name with an identity beyond the racism that he should otherwise inherit from his father.

Twain's use of the term *nigger* is disturbing, as is the characterization of Jim, especially when one considers the popularity of the book.[236] The book's critical renown, according to Jane Smiley in "Say It Ain't So, Huck,"

> was worked out early in the Propaganda Era, between 1948 and 1955, by Lionel Trilling, Leslie Fiedler, T.S. Eliot, Joseph Wood Krutch, and some lesser lights, in the introductions to American and British editions of the novel and in such journals as *Partisan Review* and *The New York Times Book Review*. (355)

For Smiley, what is more interesting than the narrative itself, is the notion of American character that is evident "*from* its canonization than *through* its canonization" (356).

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[236] Considering the worldwide popularity of the book, there is a fear that *nigger* may continue in social circulation. However, hopefully, classrooms use the book as a forum for open discussion regarding racism, rather than as an excuse to use the word. Put in this manner, it seems as though what is to be feared is people's racism, rather than the term itself. In a way, the continued popularity of the book may allow for critical discussion.

Smiley finds the book's treatment of Jim's desire for freedom to lack the necessary seriousness of handling the politics of slavery, noting how the ending is particularly weak because the beginning does not centralize Jim's quest for freedom. Hence, Smiley believes "Twain really saw Jim as no more than Huck's sidekick," leading her to argue:

> All the claims that are routinely made for the book's humanitarian power are, in the end, simply absurd. Jim is never autonomous, never has a vote, always finds his purposes subordinate to Huck's, and, like every good sidekick, he never minds. He grows ever more passive and also more affectionate as Huck and the Duke and the Dauphin and Tom (and Twain) make ever more use of him for their own purposes. But this use they make of him is not supplementary; it is integral to Twain's whole conception of the novel. Twain thinks that Huck's affection is good enough reward for Jim. (357)

Despite her claim to know Twain's intentions and her exaggeration ("All the claims"), Smiley nevertheless makes some strong points, claiming, "White Americans always think racism is a feeling, and they reject it or embrace it" (357). Smiley is correct to identify that racism is more than a conscious feeling; indeed, the most pervasive racism may be the type that effaces itself.[237] Despite such thought-provoking ideas, Smiley fails to acknowledge the text's function, and power, as a multi-layered comical text. Smiley's oversight is to take the novel as realism, not affording it the possibility that, for instance, its use of stereotype and even the term *nigger*, can be seen as a means to deconstruct the artifice of social categories that function as dangerously realistic.

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[237] For instance, while it is relatively easy to look back at post-Civil War America, Mark Twain, and *Huck Finn* as racist, it may be less comfortable to apply a similar criticism to one's current cultural framework. Certainly, Twain's frequent use of the word nigger is highly discomforting to the mainstream North American cultural mores of today, but this may be easier to see than prejudices that exist in literature, cinema, and everyday lives of people today. With racism, prejudice, hatred, and its offshoots (gossip, character assassination, preferential treatment), hindsight may be clearer. As Smiley's rhetorical style illustrates, her argument, although provocative and engaging, makes sweeping claims. In fact, sweeping claims are the very fault of racism. Along with being something easily identifiable in explicit forms, racism today may also function in less obvious and complicated ways. Consider, for instance, how academia has embraced a critique of racist, sexist, and homophobic literature, while academia itself is notoriously white and upper class. Oddly, at times scholars critique white male authors for writing about non-whites, when many white male and female academics do just that. This is not to say that writers or academics should only write about their cultural background, but it is to point out one complication in the intersection of race, literature, and scholarly criticism.

Contrasting Smiley, in "Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse," David L. Smith believes Twain captures the racism that is effaced by mid-nineteenth century American discourse. For Smith, "The book takes special note of ways in which racism impinges upon the lives of Afro-Americans, even when they are legally "free." It is therefore ironic that *Huckleberry Finn* has often been attacked and even censored as a racist work" (363). Smith believes:

> *Huckleberry Finn* offers much more than the typical liberal defenses of "human dignity" and protests against cruelty. Though it contains some such elements, it is more fundamentally a critique of those socially constituted fictions – most notably romanticism, religion, and the concept of "the Negro" – which serve to justify and disguise selfish, cruel, and exploitative behavior. (364)

Smith makes Twain into "a serious critic of American society," who challenges the stereotype of "the Negro" by employing them in a genre (Frontier humour) that relies upon stock characters. Smith explains:

> As with his handling of "nigger," Twain's strategy with racial stereotypes is to elaborate them in order to undermine them. To be sure, those critics are correct who have argued that Twain uses this narrative to reveal Jim's humanity. Jim, however, is just one individual. Twain uses the narrative to expose the cruelty and hollowness of that racial discourse which exists only to obscure the humanity of *all* Afro-American people. (367)

Racism and racist discourse is an excuse of sorts, a fiction that justifies wide scale economic exploitation. If Smiley worries that the novel's ending is weak because its beginning does not take Jim's desire for freedom seriously enough, then the text only parallels the social functioning of the relationship between the powerful and the powerless. To serve as a satire of power relations, the text cannot take Jim's desire for freedom seriously. Moreover, Jim, in a sense, has nowhere to run to, for at least two reasons. One, as Smith notes in "Huck, Jim, and American Racial Discourse," "Jim is indeed "as free as any cretur that walks this earth." In other words, he is a man, like all men, at the mercy of other men's arbitrary cruelties" (374). Two, moving from a slave state to a free state will not alter the racism in either state or save Jim from future instances of prejudice. Moreover, if Smiley is correct to point out that the ending is anti-climactic, then it must be, because there is no land of freedom, no frontier of endless possibility. As Smith says:

> There is no promised land where one may enjoy absolute personal freedom. An individual's freedom is always constrained by social relations to other people. Being legally free does not spare Jim from gratuitous humiliation and physical suffering in the final chapters, precisely because Jim is still regarded as a "nigger." Even if he were as accomplished as the mulatto from Ohio, he would not be exempt from mistreatment. Furthermore, since Tom represents the hegemonic values of his society, Jim's "freedom" amounts to little more than an obligation to live by his wits and make the best of a bad situation, just as he has always done. (374)

Jim, in a sense, can never be free of the human tendency to mistreat one another, especially those who are deemed less intelligent, incapable, or of lower class. The America in *Huckleberry Finn* is not the one of Algers, or even Turner's. Rather, this is a nation where the individual must be careful of the selfish motives that tend to dictate human relations. America is not a romanticized utopia, but a land of exploitation. Despite this, America is also a place where, for all its faults, Huck and Jim can survive.

They do not have the agency to gain the great American dream, but, as social outcasts, as fools, they can learn to minimize the blows that make them into America's punching bags.

In America, the successful and the foolish are not labels that are merely describing the results of hard working individuals. Imperialism, racism, and Social Darwinism influence not only what type of hard work is more rewarding, but, in some instances, assume some to be naturally more capable or less capable of success. In relation to the Alger equation, being less capable implies being less willing to work hard and being less likely to behave in an ethical fashion. The working ethnic complicates the work ethic. *Huck Finn* comically interrogates this gap between principle and practice, offering an alternative vision for dreaming Americans, without giving up the vision of a democratic ideal, where one will not be disrespected because of his or her race.

> We are gathered here today to celebrate this year
> of Bicentenniality, in the hope of freedom and dignity.
> We're celebrating two hundred years
> of white folks kicking ass
> (Richard Pryor, "Bicentennial Prayer," *Bicentennial Nigger*)

Conclusion to The Western Mythos of Success

For the reasons (linguistic exclusivity, popular circulation of Alger's equation, and prejudice) explored above, American society sustains a mythic value on material and social prestige, which harbours undertones of class bias and prejudice. With the spread of capitalism, certain values of material gain and social prestige have spread across the world, although it would be unfair to claim that materialism is only an American phenomenon. Before globalization, many nations already had their own mythos surrounding social prestige and material gain, Canada being one example.[238] It may be safe to say that the dynamics of such problems transcend national boundaries. In the globalized world where "green" is the colour most understood, the ideal American Dream seems intact, although the playing field is still far from level.[239]

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[238] Canada is highly influenced by American culture, but despite such influence, Canada has its own history of British and French colonial expansion over natives, the unfair treatment of members from non-white colonies, prejudice against immigrant communities, as well as its own legacy of racism, sexism, and religious prejudice.

[239] "Green" as in the color of money. In terms of a humorous social criticism regarding the Canadian dream and success, in *Why I Hate Canadians*, Will Ferguson declares: "The ultimate Canadian career is that of Associate Professor. Why? Because a career in academia has all of the elements that Canadians love best: it is very earnest, it is publicly funded, it is non-profit, and – best of all – it promises success without risk. From this comes the highly scientific and amazingly insightful Ferguson Formula for Determining the Suitability of Canadian Aspirations: CD = S – R (Canadian Dream equals Success without Risk). A career in higher education fits this formula perfectly. It involves hard work, perhaps. Talent, optional. But risk, hardly" (190). Later, Ferguson goes on to explain, "Risk? Heck, on university campuses being spineless is practically a virtue! Why have Canadian campuses become the domain of Politically Correct thugs? Because academics are weak, that's why and the PC movement is based on bullying. Why have Canadians enshrined mediocrity and come to resent success? Think tenure" (192).

Chapter VI: Serious Intellect

> Being on the public tit has never been better than
> in the echelons of higher education. This is the ultimate
> low-risk, high-reward, pseudo-prestigious job
> as far removed from the real world as possible.
> Will Ferguson, *Why I Hate Canadians*, 192

Introduction to Serious Intellect

Institutionally, the prestige associated with knowledge is manifested in the hierarchical status of the university as a locus of cultural and social power.[240] Not only does the academic sustain an image that positions him or her above the average individual (the non-intellectual), but a two-tier system being fostered by North American universities is indicative of the cultural tendency for academia to uphold a hierarchal division amongst its educators.[241] Certain tendencies in comic theory (especially seeing the comical side of human nature as lowly, non-serious, and as an object of ridicule) correlate with the tendency to position the intellectual agency as valuable, serious, and proficient.[242] The following section reflects upon the cultural value of intellect and the comic questioning of such a value. With relevant examples, including Broun's, "The Fifty-first Dragon," Shulman's "Love is a Fallacy," Thurber's "University Days," and Crews's "Paradoxical Persona: The Hierarchy of Heroism in *Winnie-the-Pooh*," the following chapter is divided into three main areas: the cultural value of intellect, academic authority, and performing the expert academic.

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[240] The western mythos of success may point to the cultural value of preserving a sense of superiority and hostility, as opposed to play or incongruity, in our understanding and use of humour both socially and within comic theory. From Plato to Hobbes, theorists stress "laughing at," as opposed to "laughing with." For those in power, laughter as ridicule augments a sense of superiority, preserving a simplistic but highly persuasive binary hierarchy between the successful and the foolish. In addition, a hierarchal system of power and the history that associates seriousness with intellect implies and indeed needs to sees those who enjoy laughter as non-serious, non-intellectual, and otherwise foolish. The idea of the foolish, undifferentiated mass sustains the status of the privileged icon of agency and intellect, hero and academic. Furthermore, there seems to be a correlation between the cultural tendency to value social status and the academic tradition towards the comic that is worth exploring if not for anything else but that fact that comic theory does not develop in isolation, but as part of wider social and cultural trends and forces. Relating to the tradition of superiority and hostility comic theory, the university may have had a vested interest in preserving and sustaining such a notion of the comic and of laughter. The university is a central social entity, continually negotiating and re-negotiating cultural values. In part, what the university negotiates is its own value and image as a place of superior intellect and learning. Because the comical is seen as the opposite of intelligent and serious, the study of the comic may come with a negative cultural stigma that some scholars may want to avoid.

[241] Please see Appendix Two for more on the Two-Tier educational system.

> Other authors can pass upon the public, by stuffing their books
> from Aristotle, Plato, and the whole company of ancient philosophers;
> thus amusing their readers into a great opinion of their prodigious reading.
> Cervantes, "The Author's Preface to the Reader," *Don Quixote*, 4

I. The Cultural Value of Intellect

I. A. Heroes, Game Shows, and Speaking Well

Based upon the previous chapter, there is a strand of thinking in the western tradition that values material and social success; moreover, that strand charts a causal link between the knowledge and agency (or lack thereof) of the successful (or unsuccessful) individual. This viewpoint manifests itself in one way through the popular conception of the Horatio Alger story, whereby an underdog of some sort (whether in fictional narratives, news stories, or sports broadcasts), to use sports parlance, defies the odds, and attains great victory.[243] The notion of the capable individual is also embodied by the cultural esteem placed upon the hero and the scholar. The hero's status may be easy to identify, because the hero figure (along with being a non-fictional concept) is continually applauded in fictional works, whereas the scholar's status may be less easily identifiable; so, first the cultural esteem for intellectual ability needs to be briefly demonstrated.

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[242] Appendix Three reflects upon general cultural tendencies and theoretical trends surrounding humour.

[243] The popular Alger departs from the specific dynamics of his original texts, but the association stands. Popular culture's Alger narrative has influences preceding Alger (Puritan work ethic, hero tales and advice of and by Benjamin Franklin, George Washington, and others), during the time of Alger (similar tales by Weems and McGuffey), and after the time of Alger (literary, cinematic, radio, television, news, and sports stories about successful underdog heroes).

The cunning hero is a champion of intellectual ability. Since Odysseus, within the western tradition, there have been many heroes regarded for their intellect. At times, this intellect is coupled with an ability to motivate through public speaking; for instance, Odysseus was considered a good public speaker. Shakespeare's *Henry V* portrays the king as a cunning strategist, who motivates his troops in Act III, Scene I, with the famous "Once more unto the breach, dear friends" speech. This type of motivational energy is repeated in battle films (such as *Glory*, *Braveheart*, or *Kingdom of Heaven*) and sports films (*Rudy*, *Remember the Titans*, or *Any Given Sunday*).[244] Along with the motivational strategist leader, there is the detective, who primarily relies on his intelligence to solve mysteries that often leave all other investigators and police officers thoroughly perplexed. Valuing intellectual skills (and often oration in the explanation of the crime), television shows such as *L.A. Law*, *Law & Order*, *C.S.I.*, and *Monk* routinely deliver the power of problem solving research, analysis, and logic.[245]

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[244] In *Glory*, various minor speeches serve to instruct the recruits, culminating in a motivational song the night before the climactic battle. In *Braveheart* and *Kingdom of Heaven*, the motivational speeches play to contemporary beliefs in the underdog and in democratic values, especially equality and freedom. In *Rudy*, *Remember the Titans*, and *Any Given Sunday*, the motivational football speech is almost an American institution, as important to the game as touchdowns and cheerleaders. In the 2005 *Film & History* article, "From "Knockout Punch" to "Home Run"," Ralph R. Donald says, "In modern America, the war film, especially the combat film genre, often blurs the distinction between war-making and sports participation, effectively melding these two contemporary constructions of masculinity (20). For Donald, both the sports film and the war film are rites of passage, demonstrating the values and actions required to move from boyhood to manhood. Specifically, Donald claims a close link between the depiction of athletics and combat via the manner in which battle films often appropriate sports metaphors in dialogue and speeches.

[245] Each of these television series reiterate the value of reasoning combined with science and a skill with words. Interestingly, the intelligence of the varying lawyers, police officers, forensic specialists, and detectives is not complete without specialized jargon. Even though the explanations, if interrogated in a

Another bridge between the fictional hero and the non-fictional scholar can be located in the tradition of the intellectual games/contests, the international MENSA organization, and intellectual prizes/awards. In terms of games/contests, in the North American tradition, this includes popular television programs such as *Jeopardy*, while, internationally, this includes the global television hit *Who Wants to Be a Millionaire?*[246] Such game programs capitalize upon the popular value of intellect, by challenging contestants with questions from diverse fields, not unlike what one may encounter in public education or undergraduate education.[247] Officially in existence for over a century, the World Chess Championships are perhaps considered the most serious of intellectual games, because, for only a couple of reasons, chess is an ancient strategy game (as opposed to a recent television network concoction) and the tournament does not air on weekly network television, a medium often deemed anti-intellectual. Founded in 1946 by Robert Berrill and Dr. Lance Ware, MENSA is an international organization

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logical sense, may not always make sense, the overall narrative and the intelligent style of the speeches lend power to the rhetoric. For instance, a detective may discover a minute detail, make amazing links, and capture the culprit at the last minute, but such astounding almost implausible links are made to appear and sound perfectly straightforward, once the intelligent characters begin speaking. One of the most famous resourceful and intelligent heroes of recent times is MacGyver. From 1985 to 1992, the American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) delivered the television series *MacGyver*, where the hero Angus MacGyver (Richard Dean Anderson) would solve threats to world safety through science, logic, and generally non-violent means. Hence, one of the taglines for the series is, "His mind is the ultimate weapon." Like James Bond, MacGyver is a secret agent. Like Professor Indiana Jones, MacGyver is highly resourceful in high-pressure situations. Like any number of detective heroes, MacGyver is highly intelligent. A cerebral hero, MacGyver fights for world peace without guns, but with a Swiss army knife and duct tape, as well as scientific ingenuity, using basic items to thwart enemy plans. In slang, "MacGyver" even came to be used as a term signifying resourcefulness.

[246] From 1956 to 1958, *Twenty-One* largely functioned as a rigged game show, with contestants being prompted in terms of how to dress, behave, and answer questions. The 1994 film *Quiz Show* (directed by Robert Redford, adapted from Paul Attanasio's book, *Remembering America*) explored the controversy surrounding the television show, which had the Charles Van Doren (Ralph Fiennes) toppling Herbert Stempel (John Turturro). Other quiz shows of the time, such as *The $64,000 Question* were also revealed to prompt contestants.

[247] Popular board games such as *Trivial Pursuit*, crossword puzzles, *Mensa* games, as well as news channels, science programs or channels (such as *The Discovery Network*), and educational websites on a variety of topics are other popular icons of the culture's value of intellect. In addition, the growth of the dictionary and encyclopaedia industry signals a great interest in educational and intellectual pursuits.

working to create a non-political, non-religious society for those geniuses, who are tested to be in the top two percent of the population. With a relatively rigorous nomination and evaluation system, the Nobel Prize, which offers awards in several fields of what was considered by Alfred Nobel as devoted to enhancing practical knowledge for humankind, is possibly the most prestigious of intellectual awards, and has also been in existence for over a century. On national and local levels, government scholarships, endowments, and other such generous avenues of patronage specifically provide awards for academics. Within a university, further recognition for intellectual achievement may come in the form of tenure, sabbatical, or course relief, as well as awards for research and teaching. Despite the difference between a weekly game show and an academic award, game shows and academic awards reveal a wide-ranging and longstanding cultural value for the intellectual. In American culture, the hero-scholar figure is a prime example of the convergence of leadership skills and intellect. Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, and Martin Luther King are highly valued for their intellect, which is often reflected in their public speaking skills, with some of their speeches being touted as great examples of inspirational oratory.[248]

Along with public speaking, the intersecting history of debate and education signals a value for competitive intellectual skills. Mock trial competitions have (most often) law-students debate (usually invented, but at times historical) cases in the fashion of an actual hearing. In the Model United Nations (UN), students take on the role of UN member nations, discussing real-world problems and debating plausible solutions. Both Mock trial and Model UN competitions have global championship tournaments. Formal debate competitions (as opposed to the informal debates/discussions customary in academic discourse) demonstrate many different valuable intellectual traits, such as research, persuasion, and handling high-pressure public situations. With American and British Parliamentary debates, for instance, debaters do not know the topic of the debate nor the side until only fifteen minutes to half an hour before the debate. In many instances, debate calls upon a wide breadth of (prepared or unprepared) factual and theoretical knowledge, as well as synthesis skills, and the ability to quickly process, evaluate, and deliver fair arguments.[249] In Russia, debates are referred to as games; in fact, Russian debaters often take the parlance of sports and apply it to debate, further illustrating the link between athletics and intellectual competition. Debate is not popular within every educational institution. Nevertheless, there is a global network of debate teams competing in high profile events, such as the World School's Debating Championship, the Karl Popper Debate World Championship, and the Mixed Teams World Championship. Historically, within the western tradition, according to Broda-Bahm et al in *Argument and Audience*, evidence of public debate dates as far back as the fifth century BC, where "Debate is first mentioned in the realm of public life in Syracuse, a Greek colony founded on the island of Sicily" (29). Whereas debate in the west was closely associated with politics, in the east, debate has close links to theology and education. In India, for instance, debates were "an important medium for theological disputes"; in China, debate was also central to religious training (33-34). In Japan, prized debates were a central part of academic life, with "debates focused primarily on literary and historical texts" (34). In Europe, "The English Parliament is thought to be the first governmental body to revive the political application of debate" during the thirteenth century reign of Edward III (35). In America, the colonial government "was rooted in the practices of the British Parliament; as a result, public debate was part of the political process long before the American Revolution" (36).[250] The senatorial debates between Abraham Lincoln and Stephen Douglas in 1858 drew thousands of voters, and concerned the divisive issue of slavery.[251] Currently, during election runs, candidates often engage in a type of debate; it is not a debate in the strict sense of a fair exchange of ideas and information, because candidates are often also highly interested in winning television audiences over and, of course, to be voted in as president.[252]

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[248] Abraham Lincoln's "The Gettysburg Address," John F. Kennedy's 1961 Inaugural Address, and Martin Luther King's "I Have a Dream" are each regarded as great American speeches.

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[249] In some instances, debaters have no advance warning of the topic they are to debate.

Although not a debate with a set of rules, the rhetoric and discourse (either in the classroom or in journals) of academia share some elements of more strict, regulated, and evaluated debate competitions. For instance, theoretical debates (in the loose sense of the term) may occur within the pages of journals devoted for specific disciplinary fields. Also, often universities organize special lectures and conferences where intellectuals share their research. Academics are also encouraged to publish more sustained works, such as conference proceedings, essay collections, or book-length treatments, all of which are part of an academic publishing industry, where the desired profit is not necessarily only financial, but more so, in the area of prestige for the institution or publishing house, and the academic. Hence, academics often pursue conference presentations and publications, in order to further enhance their own status and that of the university they represent, as well as to communicate their ideas and learn new perspectives. As evident by popular game shows, prestigious awards, competitive debates, or the very institution of the university, as well as the academic industry of conferences and publications, intellectual prowess is a valued by North American culture.

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[250] British Parliamentary Debate is a specific style of contemporary competitive debate.

[251] As with British Parliamentary style, these nineteenth century debates are institutionalized within the contemporary Lincoln-Douglas debate competition format.

[252] According to *Argument and Audience*, television debating placed a significant stress on visual appeal: "Broadcast television was already established when Stassen and Dewey debated in 1948, but it was not until 1960 that a presidential debate was televised. That year, Richard M. Nixon, the vice president of the United States, debated four times against John F. Kennedy, U.S. senator from Massachusetts, before a national audience of over 66 million. In all of their debates, Kennedy fared much better, to many viewers he looked earnest and resolute, and answered questions with skill and humor, while Nixon looked tired and shifty-eyed. The importance of physical image, though always present as a factor in debates, was greatly augmented by television. (Indeed, some scholars have noted that many voters who heard the debates on the radio – and did not see the physical contrast between the candidates – concluded that Nixon has "won" the debates)" (39). Broda-Bahm et al may be correct in assuming that Kennedy had greater visual appeal than Nixon; however, another factor may be of importance. Those who listened to radios and those who viewed television sets may have been in different economic and political demographics to begin with, so they may have already been on the side of one or the other candidate. Perhaps a resistance to turning on or having a television was an indicator of more conservative values to begin with, so they sided with the Republican Nixon. Similarly, the youthful and Democratic Kennedy may have also appealed to urbanites, who quite possibly embraced the television set more easily than more rural consumers.

I. B. Hero School

Intellectual ability, specifically, the ability to confidently problem-solve and quickly act in high pressure situations, has long been a marker of a type of heroism, that comic counterparts tend to treat such intellectual ability either through exaggeration or understatement. Exaggeration turns the intellectual hero into the wily trickster, relying primarily on his wits, and the stupidity of his comic targets. Alternatively, there is the comic variation that displays little to none of the traits upheld by the serious hero. To put it bluntly, he or she is stupid.

Connecting education and heroism, Heywood Broun in "The Fifty-First Dragon," tells of the heroic education of Gawaine le Coeur-Hardy. Broun opens the comic short story in the following manner:

> Of all the pupils at the knight school Gawaine le Coeur-Hardy was among the least promising. He was tall and sturdy, but his instructors soon discovered that the lacked spirit. He would hide in the woods when the jousting class was called, although his companions and members of the faculty sought to appeal to his better nature by shouting to

> him to come out and break his neck like a man. (*Insights Into Literature*, 51)

Risking expulsion, Gawaine is given special training in slaying dragons, on orders of the Headmaster, who feels compelled to help Gawaine, saying that the institution is "responsible for the formation of this lad's character"(*Insights Into Literature*, 51). In this story, the Headmaster feels a close link to the student and a sense of accountability for Gawaine's professional and ethical growth.[253] Gawaine quickly demonstrates a prowess in the necessary exercises, but still exhibits fear; fortunately, the Headmaster gives Gawaine a magic word, "If you only say 'Rumplesnitz,' you are perfectly safe" (53). Successfully facing a dragon, Gawaine is deemed a fine graduate, a man, and a hero.

Gawaine is not a natural knight; his status is not a symptom of his class. Rather than simply being born worthy of the heroic title, Gawaine needs to go to school to acquire the skills that make him a knight. Moreover, he is expressly established in the opening lines as the least capable of all the students learning to be the society's official class of heroes. Providing Gawaine with the magic word leads to his success:

> As the dragon charged, it released huge clouds of hissing steam through its nostrils. It was almost as if a gigantic teapot had gone mad. The dragon came forward so fast, and Gawaine was so frightened, that he had time to say "Rumplesnitz" only once. As he said it he swung his battle-ax, and off popped the head of the dragon. Gawaine had to admit that it was even easier to kill a real dragon

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[253] The Headmaster's patronage is key to Gawaine's development. The Assistant Professor of Pleasance argues for Gawaine's expulsion; however, illustrating a faith in the transformative powers of education, the Headmaster feels Gawaine can be reached and thus improve. When the Headmaster expresses such faith so as to recommend personally overseeing Gawaine's training as a dragon slayer, the unenthusiastic Assistant Professor is more concerned about funding than Gawaine: "Would any refund on the tuition fee be necessary in case of an accident to the young Coeur-Hardy?" "No," the principal answered judicially; "that's all covered in the contract" (*Insights Into Literature*, 52).

> than a wooden one, if only you said "Rumplesnitz."
> (*Insights Into Literature*, 54)

With the magic word, Gawaine quickly gains confidence and fame, killing a record fifty dragons, a record that "has never been equaled" (*Insights Into Literature*, 57). However, with the fiftieth dragon, Gawaine discovers that the word he has been using is not magical at all. Their exchange concludes as follows:

> "But you told me it was magic," protested Gawaine. "You said it was magic, and now you say it isn't."
> "It wasn't magic in a literal sense," answered the Headmaster, "but it was much more wonderful than that. The word gave you confidence. It took away your fears. If I hadn't told you that, you might have been killed the very first time. It was your old battle-ax did the trick."
> Gawaine surprised the Headmaster by his attitude. He was obviously distressed by the explanation. He interrupted a long philosophic and ethical discourse by the Headmaster with, "If I hadn't of hit 'em all might hard and fast, any one of 'em might have crushed me like a, like a – " He fumbled for a word.
> "Egg shell," suggested the Headmaster.
> "Like a egg shell," assented Gawaine and he said it many times. All through the evening meal people who sat near him heard him muttering, "Like a egg shell, like a egg shell." (*Insights Into Literature*, 56)

At this point, providing a lesson for readers, the story works in the tradition of a comic fable, highlighting the power of healthy self-confidence. However, the reaction of Gawaine does not allow the lesson to be learned. Rather than learning the secret of knighthood and thus becoming a bona fide insider into the special society that he longed to be a part of, Gawaine is killed by the fifty-first dragon. Gawaine, the egg of a student who is to hatch into a knight and fly to great heights, is instead, left muttering, "egg shell," revealing the very emptiness of magical knighthood.

Gawaine's reaction and ensuing death, along with parodying the comic fable, allows for the possibility of social commentary. All that Gawaine once believed in and all that the school prides itself on is an illusion. Despite Gawaine's and the reader's awareness, the school opts to sustain its magical and thus powerful image: "The Headmaster and the Assistant professor of Pleasance agreed that it would be just as well not to tell the school how Gawaine had achieved his record and still less how he came to die. They held that it might have a bad effect on school spirit" (*Insights Into Literature*, 56). The institution needs to protect its power, which rests in part in the belief that knights are gloriously powerful beings and that there is such a thing as magical words. With "Rumplesnitz," Gawaine believes he has gained access to the discourse of his successful authorities, but in discovering the emptiness of the phrase, he discovers the emptiness of the knightly class. As established by the early part of the text, Gawaine is stupid, so much so that he faces expulsion; in other words, the power of knightly discourse rests upon the existence of the stupidly naïve, such as the earlier Gawaine. The uninitiated genuinely believe in and thus respect the power and honour of the knights. When Gawaine refuses to perform the role of the successful hero, whose secret is violence (via the battle-axe) and authority (via both knightly reputation in general and the reputation Gawaine develops for slaying an unprecedented fifty dragons), Gawaine chooses to side with his past self. He sides with the naïve Gawaine, instead of the Gawaine that spreads the prestige of his university, the Gawaine who has learned the mystery of the power behind the knightly class. Gawaine learns the secret and knows its power, feeling the glory of his own heroism, but he ends up disillusioned. On the one hand, stupidity and cowardice explains his disillusionment. However, that reading is too limiting. On the other hand, his disillusionment with the knightly class is a genuine sense of loss in faith. By expressing his disillusion in the unmasculine manner of whimpering, Gawaine refuses the knight's empty power. This may be for three possible reasons. One, Gawaine dies to protect the secret of the university, deciding not to reveal the emptiness of the community's hierarchical division in order to protect the commoner's belief in magic and knights. Two, placing an emphasis on his own belief, Gawaine upholds a naïve belief in knights as genuinely protected protectors, as protected by the higher power of magic and as protectors of those whose faith makes the social power of knights sustainable. Rather than believing in nothing and having earthly power, Gawaine would rather believe in something greater. His death signals the tragedy of such a naïve belief in an unauthentic world. Alternatively, three, Gawaine chooses not to continue deluding those deemed lower than a knight. By facing certain death with the fifty-first dragon, Gawaine dies a noble death that affirms his heroism. If all it takes to kill a dragon is a battle-ax, then anyone, not only knights, can perform the duty. Hence, the social status of the knight and even the hero are over-emphasized. Alternatively, if Gawaine dies, then perhaps more is needed than physical skill. Laughter may also arise from Gawaine's loss of confidence or ability to handle the reality of an unauthentic world. With this reading, by the end, Gawaine remains a comical target. For yet another alternative, perhaps Gawaine died because of chance. Readers are not told of Gawaine's final loss; it could very well be that his axe simply missed this last time. Whatever the reason, "The Fifty-First Dragon" demonstrates that magical knightly power is not magical at all; rather, like many other skills, almost anyone who is relatively capable, with proper training, enthusiasm, and some luck, can achieve some level of expertise. In terms of comic nescience, the text itself offers a hero who may be both an idiot buffoon and a wise fool. Gawaine is idiotic if his final whimpering and death are a result of his loss of confidence in a magic word. Gawaine is a tragically wise fool if his final whimpering and death are an expression of his loss of faith in the ideal he once believed in. Whether by his own effort, or through chance, his death is mysterious, much like the text's comical quality.

I. C. Logic Lessons

Expertise, image, and power intersect again in Max Shulman's "Love is a Fallacy." Here, the gender demarcation is made clear, with Polly Espy serving as the desired female prize of the self-professed logical genius of a male narrator.[254] Making a deal with his college roommate, Petey Burch, the narrator gives Petey a raccoon coat in exchange for a chance to date Petey's girl, Polly Espy. The narrator's motivations are explicitly social, with an interest in fostering image and class:

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[254] Shulman's division of gender roles is especially significant considering the mid-twentieth century setting of the story, when postwar domestication and the notion of the suburban patriarch of a nuclear family first took its hold on the American social imagination. In the 2004 *American Quarterly* article "The Postwar Suburbanization of American Physics," David Kaiser claims that after the 1950s, the American university became suburbanized, turning the university into a place of security and conformity, rather than an arena for daring intellectual thought. Kaiser says: "Irving Howe, for example, lambasted postwar literary intellectuals in a scathing 1954 *Partisan Review* article titled "This Age of Conformity." Intellectuals, Howe charged, had succumbed to the "temptations of an improved standard of living" and had sunk "into suburbs, country homes, and college towns." With this descent into suburbia came a "desire to retreat into the caves of bureaucratic caution" and "intellectual conformity." Howe was hardly alone. Just a few years earlier, the iconoclastic sociologist C. Wright Mills had drawn similar conclusions about the new spate of suburban living, bureaucratization in government and the business world, and the fate of American intellectual life. Drawing on examples from his own field of sociology as well as from economics and political science, he castigated postwar academics as all too typical of the nation's new class of middle managers—bureaucratic in operation, bourgeois in outlook, and increasingly irrelevant intellectually. More than three decades later, Russell Jacoby argued in *The Last Intellectuals* that American intellectuals' postwar migration to the suburbs—"from the cafés to the cafeterias"—had fostered the narrowly specialized, jargon-filled prose that passes for academic writing in everything from literary theory and history to sociology, economics, and political science" (851-852). Kaiser extends such critiques of the Humanities into the Sciences, specifically, the field of Physics. In a related manner, in the 2000 *boundary 2* article, "American Universities," Karl Kroeber notes how the American university, while up until the 1960s were against nepotism, many universities have since encouraged nepotism, especially the hiring of husbands and wives to the same department or university. Building off of Kaiser and Kroeber, the university may have indeed become a relatively close-knit micro-community with large security gates that helps to keep out both the criminals (those with poor marks) and the police (there is no external system of evaluating or policing the practices of the university). The implication is that, at its worst, if the university is now modeled after a suburban nuclear family, then, instead of blind judging and merit guiding success, one's extended family (colleagues) and children (students) will inherit awards, scholarships, jobs, and promotions. At its best, such tendencies may be done with such objectivity (lack of bias) that such inheritance is only a matter of ensuring that the family name and business are safeguarded. Regardless of such musings, Kaiser and Kroeber help demystify the university as an ideal place of higher learning, where

> I was a freshman in law school. In a few years I would be out in practice. I was well aware of the importance of the right kind of wife in furthering a lawyer's career. The successful lawyers I had observed were, almost without exception, married to beautiful, gracious, intelligent women. With one omission, Polly fitted these specifications perfectly. (http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~loyhc/ph25b/love_is_a_fallacy.html)

The narrator then outlines Polly's beauty and grace, pointing out her only defect:

> Intelligent she was not. In fact, she veered in the opposite direction. But I believed that under my guidance she would smarten up. At any rate, it was worth a try. It is, after all, easier to make a beautiful dumb girl smart than to make an ugly smart girl beautiful. (http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~loyhc/ph25b/love_is_a_fallacy.html)

The narrator's sexism is apt, indicating the power he feels wielding logic and rhetoric in his life. Earlier, through leading questions, the narrator successfully pushes Petey to admit that he and Polly are not a serious couple, with the plan of retrieving his father's raccoon coat from 1925 and make a deal with Petey. Petey desires the raccoon-coat wearing image of "All the big men on campus," and so Petey chooses the coat, leaving Polly for the narrator. As opposed to the Faustian figure, the devil figure in this story, the narrator, is the chief character. His association with the devil is appropriate, for the narrator uses logic and rhetoric to manipulate those around him, with his primary goal being Polly Espy.

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ethical standards and inspiring school mottos guide the faculty. It is fitting then, that Shulman's narrator, as an educator, is highly interested in his own prestige, as opposed to education's ability to create greater equity or empower others.

Polly takes the role of the Dumb Dora or Dumb Blonde type, serving as the student to a superior narrator on their dates. Polly Espy is an eager student, but she finds it difficult to quickly grasp the narrator's lessons. In one manner, her stupidity is on display to laugh at. In an alternative manner, her silly demeanour reveals two important things. One, the narrator and Polly are supposed to be on a date; but since their date consists of logic lessons, the narrator is the one who is behaving rather unusually. Taken in this way, Polly is playing along rather wonderfully. Rather than flowers and a walk in the park, the narrator offers definitions of dicto simpliciter and ad misercordium. When his behaviour is matched with his motivation, to increase Polly's intelligence so she will be worthy of dating him, then the narrator seems even more problematic. If the narrator is a genius, then his intelligence is rather short-sighted, limited to defining logical fallacies and rhetorically manipulating those he speaks with. If his genius is manipulation, rather than communication, then the very status of logical genius also comes into question. In contrast to the narrator, the sweet Polly Espy seems to be a more socially intelligent, polite, and respectable character. Two, Polly's silly demeanour involves her making comments that are seemingly unrelated to definitions of logical fallacies. Consider the following exchange:

> "Listen: If Madame Curie had not happened to leave a photographic plate in a drawer with a chunk of pitchblende, the world today would not know about radium."
> "True, true," said Polly, nodding her head "Did you see the movie? Oh, it just knocked me out. That Walter Pidgeon is so dreamy. I mean he fractures me."
> "If you can forget Mr. Pidgeon for a moment," I said coldly, "I would like to point out that statement is a fallacy. Maybe Madame Curie would have discovered radium at some later date. Maybe somebody else would have discovered it. Maybe any number of things would have happened. You can't start with a hypothesis that is not true

> and then draw any supportable conclusions from it." (http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~loyhc/ph25b/love_is_a_fallacy.html)

To the narrator's frustration, Polly references a film; the narrator believes Polly is unable to focus, telling her to forget the actor. However, Polly's references signal (and foreshadow) an associative knowledge, that makes her perhaps more intelligent than the logician assumes. The difference in their perceived intelligence stems from different measuring systems. Logic is itself a system. Although powerful and often associated with the reasoning male, logic is just one way of understanding natural phenomena or engaging with people. Making associative links is also a skill, as are the pleasant communication skills Polly demonstrates. Polly enjoys the company of the narrator without the severe judgment that the narrator routinely offers about Petey and Polly.

In this way, intelligence includes respecting others. Appropriately, when Polly finally does learn the ways of logic, she does so through the fallacy of poisoning the well:

> I watched her closely as she knit her creamy brow in concentration. Suddenly a glimmer of intelligence – the first I had seen – came into her eyes. "It's not fair," she said with indignation. "It's not a bit fair. What chance has the second man got if the first man calls him a liar before he even begins talking?" (http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~loyhc/ph25b/love_is_a_fallacy.html)

The narrator's problem is that his overconfidence in his own logical agency frequently causes him to poison the well of those he communicates.[255] If communication is a two-way process where sender and receiver exchange information for greater understanding of one another, then the narrator is not a very good communicator. Rather, as a reflexive nod to the function of the narrative voice, the narrator communicates to compete, control, and influence. The narrator is selfishly trying to alter those around him to suit his needs, needs that he believes are superior to others, because he believes himself to be superior to others. Not unlike the knight who shapes the world through his sword, the narrator, the intelligent authority, both at the level of character and at a reflexive level, shapes the world around him with his rhetorical violence. In other words, if a biased narrator is presenting them, what chance has Petey Burch or Polly Espy got?

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[255] As a logical narrator, the narrator positions himself as somewhat objective, but, because of his overconfidence, his depiction of Petey and Polly is unfair.

Importantly, the narrator is myopic and unreflective; he does not see his own faults. As the short story nears its third act, the narrator makes the following bold declaration: “I had made a logician out of Polly; I had taught her to think. My job was done. She was worthy of me, at last. She was a fit wife for me, a proper hostess for many mansions, a suitable mother for my well-heeled children” (http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~loyhc/ph25b/love_is_a_fallacy.html). The narrator’s short sightedness and controlling behaviour is made clear during their final date, when the narrator wishes to propose a serious relationship:

> "My dear," I said, favoring her with a smile, "we have now spent five evenings together. We have gotten along splendidly. It is clear that we are well matched."
> "Hasty Generalization," said Polly brightly.
> "I beg your pardon," said I.
> "Hasty Generalization," she repeated. "How can you say that we are well matched on the basis of only five dates?"
> (http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~loyhc/ph25b/love_is_a_fallacy.html)

With a clever use of comic parallelism, the narrator and Polly proceed through a number of exchanges, where the cognizant agency of the narrator is finally duped. The lowly and stupid girl outplays, or tricks, the devilish patriarchal voice of logic. The term trick may downplay Polly's achievement, for more than simply trickery, she deftly uses logic to greater effect than the dynamo.

Polly's impressive performance reveals two important things about the narrator. One, if his skills can be taught and mastered by others, then it is short-sighted and foolish to feel as though one is superior to others, because one has acquired skills in logic and logical fallacies. If five days of training can best a dynamo, then the dynamo is foolish to think he is vastly superior to those without training. In fact, such an attitude reveals both selfishness and a lack of fairness; that is, if the narrator knows others are not trained as he is, then his manipulation of them is made all the more devious. He does not use rhetoric in the fair exchange of ideas, but for the advancement of his own authoritative image. Two, as Polly's associative knowledge and respectful demeanour shows, the narrator is a fool to believe that logic is the secret to life. As the title, "Love is a Fallacy," suggests, there is more to life than the system of logic and the culture's esteem afforded both logic and those who wield logic well. The climactic ending proceeds as follows:

> I said. "You're a logician. Let's look at this thing logically. How could you choose Petey Burch over me? Look at me — a brilliant student, a tremendous intellectual, a man with an assured future. Look at Petey--a knothead, a jitterbug, a guy who'll never know where his next meal is coming from. Can you give me one logical reason why you should go steady with Petey Burch?"
> "I certainly can," declared Polly. "He's got a raccoon coat."
> (http://ist-socrates.berkeley.edu/~loyhc/ph25b/love_is_a_fallacy.html)

As in the beginning of his exchange with Polly, the narrator is frustrated, so he does not demonstrate much development. In this way, although Polly and Petey begin as simpletons, the narrator is the text's ultimate comic target. The narrator relies upon a limited number of skills and a narrow view of life to manipulate his way through the university, and according to his own calculations, work towards a successful career. There is little difference wearing an intelligent image and wearing a raccoon coat. If the narrator believes it is ridiculous to wear the faddish status symbol of a raccoon coat, then he fails to see that he wears the image of a superior intellect. The difference is that Petey Burch seems honest about his desire to look "in the swim." The narrator falsely believes himself to be above such behaviour; when taken in this manner, the narrator's behaviour is less informed and thus more foolish than Petey's behaviour. Interestingly, as with "The Fifty-First Dragon," there is a blurring of the buffoon and trickster. Each key character in "Love is a Fallacy" demonstrates some stupidity and some intelligence.

Polly's final comic surprise of choosing Petey, because he has a raccoon coat, is appropriate, not only because it provides a sense of unity to the text, but also because of the open-ended quality of the joke. In one way, Polly could have chosen Petey, because she is superficial and simply likes him because of his coat. However, since she just bested a dynamo, such a reading is somewhat unrealistic for the story's parameters. In another way, Polly's "He's got a raccoon coat," is a wise response, speaking directly to the narrator's overconfidence. Why does one person love another? Can logic provide the only answer? The line fits for the way the narrator thinks. He needs to see Petey and Polly as superficial and if he has not changed throughout the story, then it seems as though he will never have respect for Petey and Polly. Polly's response then can be a non-answer to someone who believes he has all the answers, who believes he can chart the cause and effect of human behaviour so well, that he can manipulate his friends and potential love interest. When Polly says, "He's got a raccoon coat," she insightfully reveals the narrator's limiting thinking, while also revealing that love is mysterious and, in the system of logic, is a fallacy – life does not make easy sense, because compared to love, logic is easy.

> Man is the Reasoning Animal. Such is the claim. I think it is open to dispute.
> Mark Twain, "The Damned Human Race," 180[256]

II. Academic Authority

II. A. The Institution of Higher Knowing

In part, an academic's professional activities (teaching, evaluating oral presentations and written material) puts him or her in a position of not only evaluator, but also student, amassing more knowledge and expertise through contact with the work of his or her students and colleagues. Of course, aside from not having to pay tuition (in fact, professors receive pay for such training/learning), there is a key distinction between the professor as scholar and the life of the student. The professor wields power (as an evaluative authority) and enjoys a comparably comfortable position of learning, whereas the student may not – at least not a student such as Thurber. For instance, consider the experience of various students in "University Days." Unlike Thurber's account of himself during his undergraduate experience of enduring varying episodes of embarrassment in the attempt to learn as much as possible in a relatively short period of time, the professional academic lives a privileged life of safe learning, where he or she is not regularly placed into a similar position of derision.

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[256] From the collection *Mark Twain: Letters from the Earth*, edited by Bernard DeVoto.

Compared to Thurber's undergraduate, who exists in a continual process of being labelled capable or incapable, his professors have already been labelled capable by the institution they work for, so they may, more or less, freely explore the ideas that interest them. In Thurber's case, it is interesting to note how while Thurber is to blame for his failures, his educators, whose job it is to help show him the way, are also positioned as failures. Rather, their evaluative authority takes precedence over their role as accomplices in Thurber's shortcomings. In other words, (the lower in status) Thurber is the only one to blame for his weaknesses, whereas the (higher in status) institution and its representatives are not held partially responsible for Thurber's difficulties. Thurber is not the only one to blame, for his earnest efforts are clearly illustrated, whereas it seems as though his professors are not as interested in educating Thurber as Thurber is interested in learning. Rather, his professors seem more interested in positioning Thurber as an idiot; perhaps, they need to position Thurber as an idiot, in order to protect themselves from being accused of being poor educators.

To illustrate, visit Thurber in botany class. The botany professor is said to have "come back from vacation brown as a berry, bright-eyed, and eager to explain cell structure again to his classes" (319). The professor begins the story as relaxed and refreshed; his tan indicates the leisure time that affords a relaxing vacation. However, the professor's patience soon dissolves, because Thurber does not know how to manipulate a microscope properly; worse, Thurber cannot see the contents of the slide under examination. Rather than being patient or addressing Thurber's difficulties, Thurber's botany professor is clearly angry, "He cut off abruptly, for he was beginning to quiver all over, like Lionel Barrymore" (319). Thurber's task is to draw what he sees in the microscope, but Thurber ends up drawing his own eye, which is reflecting in the lens. While this is a surprise comic twist that is not what one expects to see through a microscopic lens, the incident is also important for three other comic reasons. One, in the interest of observational science, it is not unlikely that one would see a reflection of his or her own eye in the lens. Rather than ignoring the technical shortcomings of the microscope and drawing only what is on the slide, Thurber is, in a strict sense, behaving correctly as a scientist: he only draws what he literally sees, his own eye. Two, as a comment on the difficulty of scientific objectivity, witnessing his eye is an apt comic criticism of being able to observe nature without bias. The scientist Thurber influences what he is viewing, so pure objectivity is an impossibility; this comic gesture is especially pertinent considering the behaviour of his professors, who, although given the status as authoritative evaluators, are far from being objective. Three, instead of acknowledging that reflections do occur when one looks through microscopes, because of a room's lighting, the quality of the microscope, and so on, such technical factors are simply overlooked by the botany professor. Because of this, the botany professor appears primarily interested in proving the human capability to capture nature, in favour of an opportunity to shout at Thurber and to position Thurber as incapable. The professor is in the business of evaluation, and so, in a sense, he needs to position Thurber as incapable in order to sustain the sense that the students are being effectively evaluated. The professor needs Thurber to be incapable; paralleling how Thurber sees his own eye, the professor sees what he needs to see, rather than helping Thurber excel or acknowledging Thurber's objective accuracy as an insight that foregrounds the reflecting (and biased) eye that is an intimate part of observation and evaluation.

II. B. Institute of Higher Classes

"University Days" communicates a subtext of class that pits lowly student against privileged professor. Compared to the angry botany professor, Thurber's economics professor is painstakingly patient, simply feeding the answer to the school's football star, Bolenciecwcz. The professor feeds Bolenciecwcz because he is a football star and thus valuable for the prestige of the school.[257] Compared to the other characters in the story, Bolenciecwcz has a distinguishable name, which may indicate that he is from a family of recent immigrants – although this is not directly expressed by the short story. However, if one assumes such a connection, then the Bolenciecwcz section may indicate how the institution of higher education is more easily accessible to lower income groups, like immigrant groups, through athletics. It also noteworthy that the economics professor, Mr. Bassum, addresses Bolenciecwcz as Bolenciecwcz, but then turns to another student and includes the more polite "Mr.," saying "Now Mr. Nugent, will you tell us –" (320). Mr. Bassum ignores Bolenciecwcz's shortcomings as a student because Mr. Bassum does not respect Bolenciecwcz and thus, quite possibly like the institution as a whole, has no intention of honestly helping Bolenciecwcz develop anything more than his football game. Just as the botany professor constructs Thurber as an evaluative example of incapability, the institution positions Bolenciecwcz as the slow immigrant athlete. Aside from taking his tuition, the university needs Bolenciecwcz for football, offering him little else in return. In fact, it seems as though Thurber's university has little interest in helping students (especially those who need the assistance) acquire a quality education. Rather, the students depicted by Thurber seem to be used by the university.

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[257] In the 2000 *boundary2* article, "American Universities," Karl Kroeber points out that "The exponential rise of the power of higher education from the end of the nineteenth century, however, correlates uncomfortably well with the rise in popularity of football: The linkage suggests that hypercommercialization may be the destiny for both. I have heard more than one university president comment on the relation of the success or failure of the football team to fundraising. At a large state university, football uniquely offers common emotional ground for parents, students, alumni, and even townspeople, whose relations to a university are often worse than ambivalent. Conventional wisdom describes professors as indifferent, even hostile, to football, finding the football hero in the classroom, as James Thurber phrased it, not dumber than an ox but not any smarter, either. For the 1998 season, an All-American linebacker managed to become academically eligible (with a C average, in this age of grade inflation) by passing summer courses in music appreciation, golf, and AIDS alertness (none of these were available when Thurber attended Ohio State), dramatizing the curricular devolution begun by Harvard's substituting electives for mandatory courses a little over a century ago" (137).

Class figures again in the text when, during gym class, there is an implied reference to a country bumpkin. The gym class setting is appropriate, for it is the domain of Bolenciecwcz and other athletes, and because a gym class privileges physical over mental training. As with the immigrant status of Bolenciecwcz, the reference is only implied by the student's field in agriculture and by a similar agriculture student, later in the text, who is more clearly a country bumpkin. The first country bumpkin reference occurs as follows:

> Another thing I didn't like about gymnasium work was that they made you strip the day you registered. It is impossible for me to be happy when I am stripped and being asked a lot of questions. Still, I did better than a lanky agricultural student who was cross-examined just before I was. They asked each student what college he was in – that is, whether Arts, Engineering, Commerce, or Agriculture. "What college are you in?" the instructor snapped at the youth in front of me. "Ohio State University, he said promptly" (*Insights Into Literature*, 321)

The mistake is interesting on a couple of levels. One, the students makes a contextual mistake, misinterpreting the question, leading to an inappropriate response. Coupled with the student's field being agriculture, the country bumpkin stereotype or target is a suitable comic interpretation. However, the student's mistake is not simply an indicator of stupidity. Readers know this, because Thurber provides readers with the appropriate type of response. Two, for a university with compulsory military drills and seeing that the gym instructor is snapping questions, the student's response is apt. The student could take the gym instructor's question as one that is not searching for information but is seeking to demonstrate a respect for authority and an ability to follow orders. Seeing that the students have to strip during the process further makes the situation seem more like a military-type ritual of obeying authority, rather than a means to discover a student's specific field. In such a situation, students may assume their instructors to be such authorities that they already know the fields of their students. On this second level, a reader may identify with the embarrassing mistake that he or she may have made in relatable instances. Readers may laugh at and identify with the target.

After this incident, Thurber recounts the experience of a farmer journalist, Haskins, who is inept with a typewriter and produces boring stories.[258] Here again, the farmer figure is out of place within the university atmosphere. The novice journalist has not yet acquired the rhetoric of the campus newspaper, which points out two simultaneous qualities that echo throughout "University Days." One, the farmer, like Thurber, is not simply stupid. Two, being capable at the university is not as simple as gaining knowledge. Knowledge comes with a worldview. Just as seeing a plant cell implies a specific mindset of understanding plant life, the agricultural student (also associated with plant life) needs to learn how to see communication as a business that can attract readers. A test, such as being able to identify a plant cell, is based upon a standard the student must conform to and demonstrate. Thurber may be just as intelligent or more intelligent than his peers, but he has not learned how to take a university test and simply give the professor what he wants, a picture of a plant cell. Thurber is resistant to the rhetorical demands of the university's testing.

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[258] In the 2003 *Technology & Culture* article ""What These People Need is Radio,"" Randall Patnode points out that in the 1920s, "farmers were depicted by the popular press as ideally positioned to profit from what radio did best: bridge large distances and provide an abundance of information and amusement. In focusing on radio's potential to redeem rural America, press accounts exaggerated the shortcomings of farm life, casting the farmer as an antimodern "other" and indirectly lending support to an increasingly urban and modern way of life" (285). By making a journalist farmer, Thurber is pairing two incongruous stereotypes, for the journalist is the urban, hip individual who literally is on top of everything new, while the farmer is the bumpkin with overalls and a pitchfork.

Becoming "knowledgeable" in university involves acquiring the rhetoric, style, and persona that helps make one appear unlike a country bumpkin or an immigrant athlete. Excelling at farming and athletics takes skill, training, hard work, discipline, expertise, and other traits similar to becoming a successful student or an effective professor. The skills of one field are not inherently more complicated than the other, but certain skills are deemed more or less valuable by prevailing social standards, tradition, and class. Success at university is not simply determined by skill and knowledge. Success is also influenced by factors such as the following: one's class background, familial education level, ethnicity, gender (there are no female students or professors in Thurber's story), resources, and time. For instance, Bolenciecwcz may have to spend hours in football drills and taking hits to the head, while his economics professor Mr. Bassum can simply brag that his school has a great football team, possibly earning the school more funding, so the botany professor can earn time for another vacation.

To return to Thurber's inability with a microscope, it is appropriate for Thurber to not see the contents of the slide for two reasons. One, the comic vantage point in this instance prefers a broader perspective than that of the microscopic. Using cinematographic parlance, the microscopic viewpoint is a close up perspective that

Chaplin, for instance, identified with more serious and dramatic moments. For Chaplin, the comic perspective needs to pull back, in order to see a larger vision of things. The larger vision helps to keep a reasonable distance between the audience and the character, so the audience can see the character as more of a cartoon, rather than an actual human being who may be hurt by a pratfall.[259] This is not to say that the audience should not care for a comic character, but it is to indicate an emphasis of comic distance over serious identification. The comic Thurber cannot see through the microscope without jeopardizing the comic perspective of his narrative voice.

The second reason why Thurber cannot see the contents of the slide is because the slide under examination is synonymous with a student being sliced, scrutinized, and evaluated. From Thurber's point of view, an organic plant cannot be reduced to its smallest parts; similarly, a living student cannot be reduced to his weakest components or to the rhetoric of a university test. Indeed, if a plant is to grow, it cannot be quarantined to a slide. If a student is to continue learning, then that student must face the unknown in order to broaden his or her knowledge, rather than becoming too comfortable in his or her own sense of expertise. Like the life cycle of a plant, learning is a process of dynamic change. For learners, that process involves enduring mistakes and moving into a position of embarrassment risked by Bolenciecwcz, Haskins, and Thurber. The still plant may make a good slide, or by implication, even a good student, but being a good learner is more than standing up to a moment of close and supposedly objective/scientific scrutiny. Offering an alternative, "University Days" says being a quality student involves a willingness to push one's boundaries outside of the tempting comfort offered by the familiarity with a subject area that Thurber's professors demonstrate. In this way, his professors are more restricted and less capable than Thurber, who is not afraid to admit, in the end of the narrative, that he does not know. Thurber must see his own eye in the microscope, because although he lacks the cognizant agency of his botany professor, he perhaps wields some wisdom concerning the reflecting eye of the observer that is typically effaced as authoritative, evaluative, and objective.

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[259] Perhaps Chaplin read Bergson, or Bergson heard Chaplin. In *Laughter*, Bergson reinforces Chaplin's view: "The comic will come into being, it appears, whenever a group of men concentrate their attention on one of their number, imposing silence on their emotions and calling into play nothing but their intelligence" (http://www.authorama.com/laughter-2.html). As explained previously, comic nescience disagrees that only intelligence is at work. In this case, three qualifications are apparent. One, at times, silencing one's emotions can be rather unintelligent. Two, laughing at someone possibly hurting himself or herself may involve some negative emotion. Three, laughing at someone else is not necessarily a symptom of directing one's view in an outward fashion. To explain, the laugher may worry about being in the target's position and thus laugh nervously. Whatever the reasons, comic nescience claims laughter arises from multiple, overlapping, and even contradictory (such as laughing at, yet identifying with, the target) causes.

> we are not as important, perhaps, as we had all along supposed we were.
> Mark Twain, "The Damned Human Race," 184

III. Performing the Academic Expert

III. A. Parodic Duality, Intellectual as Serious and Plato's Paranoia

Just as some may see humans as fundamentally evil or as fundamentally good, debate in comic theory often stems from regarding comical discourse as fundamentally vicious or fundamentally light-hearted, or from seeing the comical as ridiculous or as ludicrous. For instance, in *A Theory of Parody*, Linda Hutcheon considers parody to be more than ridiculing imitation. Her conception of parody moves parody away from the almost instinctual, non-professional sense of mockery towards a more complicated and professional type of "reassessment and acclimatization" (2). Hutcheon calls parody "one of the major forms of modern self-reflexivity," or a form of "inter-art discourse."

Hutcheon's emphasis on parody as art is very significant, because it pushes discussion of parody away from its strong association with ridicule as something negative, while preserving the value of ridicule as critical reassessment. For Hutcheon, "parody is a form of imitation, but imitation characterized by ironic inversion, not always at the expense of the parodied text" (6). Hutcheon's association of parody with self-reflexivity is significant, because the laughable in general has been associated with a lack of self-awareness. Parody as ridicule and mockery is an aggressive act of insult humour. The parodist is offensive, associated with rude and disrespectful behaviour – behaviour that lacks self-awareness. Alternatively, parody, as self-aware inversion, is an artistic act that notices form, foregrounds style, and in the process, may interrogate the relationship between text and audience. Hutcheon and Rose, in their different ways, attempt to save parody, by positioning it as a complex art form.

While Hutcheon and Rose have produced important scholarly work, it would be misleading to ignore the existence of insulting humour, which seeks to degrade and mock, perhaps with little regard to form, style, or text and audience relationships. Just as comedy has a wider circulation in contemporary culture, although to a lesser degree, parody is more than what Hutcheon and Rose primarily identify and applaud. North American radio shock jocks, as their titles imply, may be more interested in shock humour, mockery, ridicule, insults, and other rude behaviour, rather than serious self-aware interrogations of art. The work of radio shock jocks may be serious and artistically complex, but not necessarily or in the manner that is privileged by Hutcheon and Rose. In terms of artistic complexity, whether intended or not, the Internet film, *Day-O* was based on a song parody created by radio shock jocks. It would be unrealistic to assume that all parody does not harbour some hate, or even racism, sexism, or other types of extremist feeling. For instance, on January 21st, 2005, Hot 97/WSHT (in New York city) was the site of controversy for a song parody. On "Miss Jones in the Morning," African-American Tarsha Nicole Jones and her crew delivered a parody of those songs of charity, which emerge during times of crisis, entitled, "Tsunami Song." While a case could be made that the song was a harmless parody, an exchange between the members of the radio show before the song airs indicated some racial tension. While host Miss Jones and Todd Lynn are excited about the song, Asian-American Miss Info considers the song racially offensive against Asians and refuses to be associated with it. Considering racial tensions between African-Americans and Asian-Americans in the Los Angeles riots, the fact that the radio station did not act in a similar fashion with the earlier September 11th attacks or later during Hurricane Katrina, it is highly likely that the song was motivated by ethnic hate. Less a parody of popular songs that raise money for disaster victims and more of an attack on Asians and Asian-Americans, "Tsunami Song," demonstrates how some humour lacks artistic complexity. Even if delivered by professionals, the song lacks comedic professionalism, appearing amateurish and not much more than an excuse to be racist. Along with "Tsunami Song," there are many amateurish comedians whose stand up acts are loosely connected opportunities for insult. More extreme social cases of violence and the comical can be located in schoolyard bullying, hazing rituals, and other acts of intimidation. In other words, even though Rose and Hutcheon effectively argue for the valuing of parody as something more than mockery, ridicule, insults, and hatred, at times, a mix of intimidating humour and actual violence, does exist. Some works may be more interested in ridicule, mockery, and hate, while others may tend towards the ludicrous, playfulness, and self-reflexivity. The degree to which a work is ridiculing varies.[260]

Hence, of primary interest to this dissertation, because parodies may range from insulting mockery to complex artistic pieces, parody may not be fundamentally ridiculous or ludicrous, but something more nescient, varying according to the artists, the workmanship, and cultural milieu.[261] Similarly, comedies and satires may exhibit a range that makes them more or less crude and vicious. The parody of academic work is especially important in contemporary times, because the academic persona is often built around the prestige of academic publishing. Supposedly, another important aspect of the academic persona is having some brains.

Intellect is commonly associated with non-comic communication.[262] Especially when it comes to written academic criticism, analysis is deemed more serious if the tone bears a gravity that has been correlated, since Plato, with not only the intelligence, but also the status of the philosopher king. The apparent complexity of an analytical work may be more the result of style than the profundity of what is being communicated. Acknowledging academic writing as a style, as opposed to simply being taken as an indicator of a dazzling intellect, "The Author's Preface to the Reader" in *Don Quixote* declares: "Other authors can pass upon the public, by stuffing their books from Aristotle, Plato, and the whole company of ancient philosophers; thus amusing their readers into a great opinion of their prodigious reading" (4). The preface advises upon the inclusion of Latin: "These scraps of latin will at least gain you the credit of a great grammarian, which, I will assure you, is no small accomplishment in this age" (5). The preface provides examples of how to include annotations and remarks in order to impress the reader with the persona of knowledge. For "The Author's Preface," the trick to writing intelligently lies in associating one's work with recognizable philosophers, to share their esteem. As well, writers are advised to adopt prevailing conventions of intellectual discourse, such as making references in Latin. The respect afforded the academic stems from two sources. One, the academic writer shows off his or her knowledge, by citing famous thinkers. Two, such company earns the academic respect; the writer dialogues and thus associates himself or herself with the prestige of Plato, Aristotle, and others.

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[260] In terms of artistic hierarchy, those works with greater complexity and less hate tend to be more valuable. In addition, insult humour tends towards the non-professional, everyday, gossip type of humour, so insult humour may also be less valuable, because in some circles it may be commonplace.

[261] Within a certain environment, racist songs may be considered artistically valuable. For instance, in *White Canada Forever*, W. Peter Ward speaks of an early twentieth century music hall (non-parodic) song, "White Canada Forever" that was popular. Serious works, by an otherwise intelligent individual, lawyer, state legislator, and preacher Thomas Dixon Jr., delivered a narrow-minded racist vision. Dixon's trilogy, *The Leopard's Spots: A Romance of the White Man's Burden 1856-1900* (1902), *The Clansman: An Historical Romance of the Ku Klux Klan* (1905), and *The Traitor* (1907) were highly popular and successful plays, with *The Clansman* being adapted for cinema by D.W. Griffith as *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), a controversial but critically praised film.

[262] To a certain degree, wit, if used sparingly, is considered intellectually valuable, but as far as comic expression goes, it is fair to say that there is a hierarchy between what can be regarded as intellectual comic expression and non-intellectual comic expression.

While intelligent communication is associated with polysyllabic adjective-rich verbiage punctuated with copious references, the preface distinguishes the writing style of the novel itself. Referring to academic references, the advising friend to Cervantes, Sancho Panza says: "if I know anything of the matter, you have no occasion for any of those things; for your subject being a satire on knight-errantry, is so absolutely new, that neither Aristotle, St. Basil, nor Cicero ever dreamed or heard of it" (6). Rather than a learned (and thus hierarchical) style, the advisor offers the following alternative:

> And since this writing of yours aims at no more than to destroy the authority and acceptance the books of chivalry have had in the world, and among the vulgar, you have no need to go begging sentences of philosophers, passages out of holy writ, poetical fables, rhetorical orations, or miracles of saints. Do but take care to express yourself in a plain,

> easy manner, in well-chosen, significant, and decent terms, and to give an harmonious and pleasing turn to your periods: study to explain your thoughts, and set them in the truest light, labouring, as much as possible, not to leave them dark nor intricate, but clear and intelligible . . . (7)

As opposed to an impressively ornate style, the advisor emphasizes clear communication. While academic writing consists of associating one's voice with great thinkers and thus upholding the tradition of the hierarchical thinker, "The Author's Preface" positions *Don Quixote* as a satire, where, as opposed to relying upon the established esteem of great thinkers, mythological heroes, or legendary knights, a previously unknown and lowly fool, Don Quixote, takes a central and thus original position.

As a character type, however, Don Quixote is not entirely original, because the fool was played by Socrates in an earlier time; the difference is Socrates is identified as performing as a fool, whereas Don Quixote quite simply is a fool, who is no longer able to distinguish, clearly and hierarchical, between documentary reality and his imaginative embodiment of the reality offered by chivalric romances. Despite his warning against ridicule, Plato creates one of the greatest *eirôns* in western literary history, with Socrates, who routinely plays with the logic of his opponents, and, in a sense, ridicules their intellectual ability. So, on the one hand, Plato warns against the ill effects of comedy, the disrespect of ridicule, and the unbecoming quality of bursting into laughter; but, on the other hand, Plato's Socrates routinely tricks his opponents with verbal gymnastics, as opposed to respectfully trying to understand and aid in the development of the argument of whomever he is speaking.

For all of Plato's warning against envy, Plato's worldview seems as though it was written by someone envious for power, especially for the power of the philosopher king;

hence, Plato's attitude towards comedy may be explained by the possibility that Plato is threatened by comedy. Plato's conception of society stems from the dutiful respect of the intellectual ruler; Socrates is a prototypical *eirôn*, but he is in the service of Plato. Plato presents the verbal victories of Socrates, so we do not have an unbiased account of the debates Socrates engaged in, but, nevertheless, Socrates as *eirôn* is a powerful force that, according to his episode with hemlock, threatened the powerful elite of ancient Greece. Quite possibly learning from those who had to deal with Socrates, Plato develops a system of thought that employs the *eirôn*, effectively reducing the risk of having an interrogator continually questioning and unravelling the logic of the ruler. Therefore, while Plato's sense of comedy as ridicule fuels the development of superiority theories and aggression in comedy, there is the possibility that Plato's negative attitude towards the comical stems from a fear of the disruptive powers of comic aggression.

Plato relates to comic nescience in two ways. One, by conceiving laughter as especially unsuitable for the intellectual, Plato signals a fear of the lack of self-control associated with the act of laughing.[263] Laughter is counter to the confident cognizant agency of the thinker; hence, the masculine leader is one who does not laugh or give way to the overwhelming power of the emotions or silly contortions of the body; rather, the masculine leader is one whose intellect commands control over his emotions and intellect.[264] Two, Socrates as *eirôn* is a figure feigning ignorance to craftily expose the faults (perhaps due to over-confidence) of his opponents. The power of Socrates is not his own, however. From the perspective of comic nescience, Socrates is one part of the dialogue, one half of the opposing forces. Since Socrates plays the *eirôn*, one may wonder if Plato's writings are documents of serious debates, or if the two were an early comedy team, parodying serious debates. Regardless of the intent of Plato and Socrates, and despite cultural attitudes to the contrary, it is possible to be both silly and serious.

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[263] As Feibleman points out in his *In Praise of Comedy*, Plato may have a less negative attitude towards comedy. This implies that Plato's warning is a serious one, but perhaps not as dogmatic as is often implied by some of the subsequent surveys of Plato's perspective. Feibleman says, "The *Symposium* itself is one grand comedy, comedy in the highest sense of the word, and there is nothing mean about it. Thus it replaces, by transcending, the explicit definition of comedy given by Plato in his later and less compromising works. That Plato could take comedy in good stead, is well illustrated in the *Apology* where Socrates reminds his accusers of the satire which Aristophanes levelled against him in *The Clouds*; and again in the *Symposium* itself, where Alcibiades speaks of Socrates in the very words used originally by Aristophanes" (76-77).

III. B. The Death of the Author, the Birth of the Critic

The performance of intellect and the drama of scholarly exchange are central to academia. If the fool is someone that Socrates may play, then, as illustrated by "The Author's Preface," the knowing philosopher is also a figure that can be and is played by academics.[265] *Don Quixote* reveals the knight, a figure on the higher rung of the social hierarchy, to be a role that can be adopted by an individual who is largely unsuitable to be a knight.[266] Indeed, readers of chivalric romances may vicariously enjoy the adventures of their favourite heroes, imaginatively becoming knights on dangerous adventures. Although Quixote is a member of a higher class himself and perhaps, then, more likely to be a knight, the fact that others easily take on roles from chivalric romances point out how being a knight, (or how an innkeeper can bestow knighthood, or even how Aldonza Lorenzo can become the beloved Dulcinea del Toboso) is less a matter of breeding and more a matter of perception and social agreement. *Don Quixote* tells us that where there is no serious social agreement, then there is comedy. Through his own proclamation, Don Quixote becomes a knight, but the majority of characters do not socially validate the new knight. Fortunately, if readers over the centuries applaud him and name him so, then Don Quixote indeed becomes a knight.

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[264] From *In Praise of Comedy*, Feibleman says: "In his later works Plato pretended to an extremely low opinion of comedy, holding that it was fit only for slaves and strangers, an opinion which seems to have been dictated more by political requirements that by anything else. For Plato gave great importance to the holding of power in its physical sense, an understandable prejudice since he elsewhere defined being itself as power. And since comedy was to be the revelation of impotence behind a pretended power, it was surely not to be discovered in the supreme leaders of the state, nor to be seriously treated by anyone except in the plainest jest and then only by inferior persons" (76).

[265] When Barthes said the author is dead, he could have also boldly declared that the critic was born. This is not to say that the critic was ever absent, but if the author is minimized and if the text can no longer be deciphered in the vein of scientific objectivity (as with the Formalists), then the critic as a purveyor of meaning becomes more important. Criticism becomes, to a great degree, not simply about the interpretation of an author's work, but about one's interpretation of other critics.

[266] Although Don Quixote is born into an aristocratic household, he does not bear the physical prowess of the mighty knight. Nevertheless, in a way, Don Quixote's persistent effort to embody noble ideals is inspiring, which makes him more knightly than his lack of physical capability or his silly demeanour.

At least for his spirited effort and his resulting inspiration, Quixote is a knight. Quixote is validated by his multicultural, multi-linguistic acceptance as a loveable fool. The naïvely ideal vision of the Spanish protagonist becomes a part of the English language, with the word quixotic. For the German Romantics, Quixote is stressed less as a comic fool and more of a tragic dreamer. For authors such as Mexican Carlo Fuentes, *Don Quixote* is the beginning of Spanish literature. For the Russian Formalists, *Don Quixote* is a favourite example. For several different nations, *Don Quixote* is identified as one of the first novels. Adapted for Broadway, an inspiration for esteemed paintings (for instance, by Honoré-Victorin Daumier), marginal cartoon series (such as *Don Coyote*), and even the name of an International music hall, *Don Quixote* is a global meme, a living concept that has currency well beyond its Spanish-language origins in Cervantes's comic inkpot. If he was not knighted during his adventures, then ever since, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza have since been knighted by the rest of the globe.[267]

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[267] In the literal sense, *Don Quixote* may not be known to the same extent in every single nation all over the world; so, the choice here is more of a rhetorical one, than a factual one or even one supported by hard sociological evidence of how many people appreciated *Don Quixote*. Simply, "by the rest of the world"

While the text itself demonstrates the artifice of knightly status, "The Author's Preface" highlights the artifice of being regarded as an intelligent thinker and writer. Similarly, *The Pooh Perplex* and *Postmodern Pooh* also highlight the conventions of intelligent discourse, bringing the academic personality to the fore. For instance, each essay in the collections is introduced by a brief biography of a fictional scholar. Being parodies of serious academic criticism, the voice of the academic author is highlighted in a way that is perhaps overlooked by the more serious reading of academic essays. Academic essays are regarded less for the voice of the author, than for the insights offered, the theories being critiqued or advanced, the ideas being explored, and, of course, the myriad of intelligent references being made. Academic essays, however, do have a voice, an authoring persona that positions itself as authoritative, well-read, intelligent, and indirectly, as wise as or wiser than whomever is being critically questioned – at times, the critic tries to be humble and polite.

The tension between remaining humble, yet boldly asserting the failings of other scholars, is exposed in the parodies of Crews. From *The Pooh Perplex*, "Paradoxical Persona: The Hierarchy of Heroism in *Winnie-the-Pooh*" by Harvey C. Window makes for an appropriate introductory essay to the collection, for not only does it establish the comic tone of the series, but, also, it highlights the very concept of persona through its analysis of *Winnie-the-Pooh*. The essay begins in an appropriately authoritative way, claiming, "No one in these days, I feel sure, will care to complain that there is a lack of critical attention to *Winnie-the-Pooh*" (3). The hasty generalization is fitting for the academic voice, seeing that Window seeks to establish himself as an authority, while

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sounds more powerful than "by several nations that have translated, adapted, been inspired by (in art, theatre, television, and film), or regularly re-issue and critically engage with the novel."

instantly shutting down any possible retort. The first sentence in Window's essay creates a sense of inclusiveness that calls for the reader to identify with the intellect of the author. Appropriately, the name Window itself figures this scholar as a clear and unbiased observer of the text, not unlike how one views the world through a window.[268] By implication, the reader can trust the scholar, for through Window one may see the text as it is. Quickly, the essay asserts its own value, by opposing other academic voices:

> It is, then, with a sense of my own temerity – if not, indeed, of outright rashness – that I must assert that Ogle, Smythe, Bunker, and Wart have completely missed the point of *Pooh*. Valuable as their studies have been in establishing certain connections and parallels that other scholars might not have thought worth pursuing, I cannot honestly say that we have learned anything significant from them. Neither Ogle, nor Smythe, nor Bunker, nor Wart asked himself the absolutely basic questions about *Winnie-the-Pooh*, and thus each of them necessarily failed to grasp the key to the books entire meaning. I find myself in the embarrassing position of being the only professor of this key, and I am writing this essay only to alter such an unbalanced situation as quickly as possible. (4)

Harvey C. Window's self-promotion is a recurrent rhetorical strategy in academic discourse, an implied claim to a competitive and hierarchical (although often self-proclaimed) standing amongst critics.

Competition and hierarchy are often a part of academic discourse. The academic's status relies in part on the (however imagined) existence of naïve readers, who fail to grasp the artistic and philosophical complexity of literature. As the unrecognizable references in Window indicate, Window speaks of and to a select few, a distinct class of intellectuals who are walled off from the reader, who is unaware and average. Rather than explaining his interpretation of the arguments of those he cites,

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[268] Note how similar imagery is used by Thurber in "University Days," with the microscope's glass slide.

Window drops names, dismisses them, and then works on establishing his own name. Window's self-promotion also comes at the cost of education; rather than educating the reader with the key debates surrounding *Winnie-the-Pooh*, Window preserves the boundary between those in and out of "the know." The academic's status is also based upon a relationship with other, less capable scholars. Window wields his intellect in order to ridicule those he deems less knowledgeable, as though he wants to set himself as the king of doctorate of philosophy kings. Window wants to set himself apart from those others and in doing so, deems them lesser; hence, his references to other scholars reveal not only his ability to read a great deal, but also serves as an opportunity for a critical commentary that asserts his own intellectual prowess. For instance, Window makes the following references and critical commentary:

> Let us say at the outset that, if all great literature is more complex than the naïve reader can suspect, it is equally true that this complexity, once discovered, can be rendered in simple terms. Caroline Spurgeon's reduction of Shakespeare's imagery to certain recurrent patterns is a case in point; one could only have hoped that such an important matter could have been revealed to us with more taste, wit, intelligence, and style. (I myself had already noticed most of the patterns before reading Spurgeon, by the way.) Again, Professor Lovejoy's demonstration of the importance of the Great Chain of Being in Renaissance literature, while somewhat over-stated and self-evident, did have the virtue of reducing complexities to simplicities. (5)

Window's references then serve as means for not only critical commentary, but also a commentary that explicitly showcases his perceived sense of superiority. Highlighted by the above quote, the notion of reducing complexities to simplicities is particularly resonant.

III. C. Simplifying Complexity

In Window's "Paradoxical Persona," the relationship between simplicity, complexity, and academic discourse is important for two reasons: one, the parodies analyze A.A. Milne's simple book, *Winnie-the-Pooh*; two, the notion of reducing complexity to simplicity points out a limit to, and choice of, academic discourse.

One, the notion of reducing complexity to simplicity is relevant, because *Pooh* is an actual children's book that serves as the inspiration for the fictional academics. A central comic incongruity of Frederick Crews's parodic essay collections is their use of *Pooh* as a provocative cultural phenomenon. A child reader helps personify the notion of a naïve or uneducated reader, while the choice of a relatively simple text helps highlight the academic's task of claiming and perhaps even creating complexity.[269] The cute, cuddly, and non-threatening bear is deciphered in ways that seem well beyond the basic story of a toy bear's adventures. In "A Bellyfull of Pooh," Victor S. Fassell points out:

> all of the characters in *Pooh* except Christopher Robin – who looks, wouldn't you agree, rather like Twiggy in shrunken shorts – are stark naked. . . . One apron briefly appearing on Kanga's bosom and one ribbon on Eeyore's tail, instead of contradicting my point only serve to underscore it by fetishizing the breast and phallus, respectively . . . (*Postmodern Pooh*, 25)

By using *Pooh* as the core text, Crews implies three things. One, *Pooh* is not great literature, and all of the parodies demonstrate how inappropriate some criticism can be, when complex readings are attached to non-canonical, popular, or supposedly simplistic works.[270] Two, whether intended or not, *The Pooh Perplex* and *Postmodern Pooh* demonstrate how all academic interpretations may be creative acts, built upon voices of self-professed authority. Three, since both positions exist within academia, these parodies of academic analysis could be implying both positions at once. Literary criticism is often concerned with the artistic status or categorization of works, with different scholars arguing for the merits or drawbacks of one work or another. For some, analyzing *Pooh* is frivolous, lacking the academic rigour required in the analysis of Plato. For others, *Pooh* is a suitable work to analyze, and, in doing so, academia may be enriched by taking a text seriously, when traditionally it has been dismissed or overlooked as insignificant. Academic criticism, whether the analyzed work is Plato or Milne, makes choices that favour some authors/thinkers over others; in addition, whether an analysis delves into Plato or Milne, the critic also demonstrates some creative interpretive license. In a field where peers compete with one another for paid leave and government grants, Window's antagonism is especially fitting. Conferences, journal publications, and lectures can be friendly exchanges of ideas, but since such avenues are not guarded by the idealistic Don Quixote, they can also harbour professional tension and competition. "Paradoxical Persona" is not simply an opportunity to offer an analysis of *Pooh*, nor is the essay only a chance to offer variations to the scholarly study of *Pooh*; rather, for Window, the essay is an opportunity to demonstrate his intellectual prowess and, by association, that of his university – which will reward Window with time off for good publishing behaviour. If, as Window claims, an academic can simplify complex ideas and if academic writing is deliberately complex, then academics such as he have made a choice to be complex and thus sustain their sense of hierarchical difference from the naïve, childlike reader and to remedy the failings of other scholars.

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[269] This is not to say that children's literature is not complex. Like comic texts, children's literature tends to be overlooked as simplistic and only capable of sustaining the attention of children. However, children's literature may be much more complex than traditionally perceived; such a claim may have been especially significant during the original 1963 release of *The Pooh Perplex*. Today, children's literature is more culturally significant than it once was, especially since nowadays, traditional literature departments have expanded to include the study of children's literature and even television series starring Don Knotts.

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[270] For the record, in my opinion, *Winnie-the-Pooh* is great literature.

Two, along with its use of *Pooh*, the notion of reducing complexity to simplicity is important to academic discourse for three reasons that can be termed limits. Before exploring those reasons however, it is necessary to explain why fields may require specific terminology. Sustaining a field-specific discourse has a certain pragmatic function, for those within a field can use certain terms and refer to certain scholars or schools of thought as a sort of shorthand. Communication is made more efficient, because a sub-field cultivates its own community of scholars who share a certain theoretical language. One reason why this situation becomes the source for parody and satire stems from the "limit," or tendency for a field-specific language to become a means to quarantine exchange amongst scholars, leaving non-experts without an opportunity to listen in on or join in the discussion.[271] Doing so would require the communication to slow down, via brief explanation of a concept here or the introduction of a theorist there.[272] Instead, the discussion is limited to experts, who may foster such jargon-laden prose that "English-language scholar" would not be a precise enough description.

Herein lies the problem with education within academia. To a large degree, an educator's role is to explain, rather than obfuscate. Pragmatically, a teacher should serve as a guide through concepts, which may appear initially complex, until, the student is able to wield the appropriate discourse with some comfort. A basic definition of education is to simplify complex concepts for the uninitiated, so the uninitiated may learn what the teacher knows.[273] From the Latin root, *educare*, to educate signals a process of channelling.[274] For educators, this can mean bringing out the potential and passion of students. Using the oceanic imagery, education also can channel something seemingly overwhelming into easier to manage ducts or canals. Educators can demystify the complex. However, because complexity is associated with difficulty, academic jargon helps sustain a persona of intellectual prowess. Hence, academics embody a tension between complexity and simplicity: to pursue the image of being those few who are able to understand or decipher complex ideas. For a toddler, the alphabet may seem rather daunting, but through a teacher's help, the toddler soon masters the necessary tools. For academia, a complicating factor is the desire to maintain status (and the authority and privilege that goes along with it). Hence, a second reason for valuing complexity in discourse is to sustain a hierarchical difference from those outside a certain field; too much explanation may lessen the magical allure of the academic wizard.

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[271] Academic discourse provides a limit, a boundary between academics and non-academics that makes for an appropriate opportunity of comic transgression, such as parody and satire.

[272] This concern exists, even though listening to conference papers (or reading graduate student theses) is often at odds with anything resembling efficiency. In terms of explanation, even if amongst experts, in the Humanities, some explanation may be necessary to help reveal to others how one perceives a concept or understands a theory. However, as with most positions of power, a lack of explanation and a lack of clarity may serve another purpose. That is, some vagueness or ambiguity may cause one's work to appeal to a wide variety of scholars, thus leading to a variety of approving nods whilst one read his or her paper. In addition, as Sokal's famous essay illustrated, like people in differing professions, academics may pay enough attention to the right names being quoted and key terms being spoken for one to gain nods of approval without having to say too much.

The third reason why Window's stress on complexity and simplicity is important stems from the logical limits of complexity. From a critical perspective, most communicated ideas, even those deemed the most complex, are, at their roots, simplistic. If a concept or theory is knowable and can be communicated amongst scholars, then such a concept bears consistent characteristics that can be identified and understood by anyone with a reasonable level of intellect. If something is knowable, then it can be simplified. If it can be simplified, then it can be mapped out for a layperson, or, alternatively, to preserve an aura of intellectual authority, that something can be masked through jargon and insider discourse (such as through making sub-community specific references). Being an academic involves being a part of a community recognized as the educated elite; parodies such as *The Pooh Perplex* or *Postmodern Pooh* may help academics not believe too much in their own inherited and contemporary hype.

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[273] The initiation ritual is exemplified by the graduation tradition of being awarded a gown and gap. Arnold van Gennep would consider graduation a rite of passage, where the flip of the cap's tassel symbolizes the transition from one position in life to another, whereas the cap itself traditionally signalled a rise in status.
[274] This notion of education is from *The Concise Oxford English Dictionary*.

As an alternative to confident knowing, one may sense the nescience, and thus complexity, of wisdom. *The Pooh Perplex* and *Postmodern Pooh* provide the opportunity for several different readings. They uphold academic discourse, because the works analyze a children's book; legitimate academic discourse deciphers complex and often canonical works, not books with *Pooh* in the title. They reduce a scholar's work to making a children's book about a soft-spoken honey-obsessed bear appear complex, through varying theoretical approaches and terminology. Alternatively, the parodies can be interpreted somewhere in between these poles. Because they are identifiable parodies, billed as such by the publisher and confessed by the author, and if we are encouraged to look for exaggerations in order to laugh at and with them, academic discourse is not as impressive within *The Pooh Perplex* or *Postmodern Pooh* as it may be within a more serious context.[275] "The Author's Preface" in *Don Quixote* notes how intellect is partly the product of a discernible style and persona, and to a great degree, *The Pooh Perplex* and *Postmodern Pooh* have identified that style. Aside from such markers of parody, however, *The Pooh Perplex* and *Postmodern Pooh*, place the reader into a position of comic uncertainty, and thus, perhaps a certain degree of wisdom. By referring to unrecognizable (fictional) critics and by taking such a resolute tone with *Winne-the-Pooh*, *The Pooh Perplex* and *Postmodern Pooh* place the reader into a position of the outsider looking in on the impressive discourse of academics. The reader is the lowly layperson, amazed by the discourse and even made to feel unintelligent, because he or she cannot follow the intricacies of the imbedded debates or the usage of field-specific terms. However, because the content is nonsense, the reader's position allows him or her to notice form and style, the academic's persona. The reader is placed into a position of unknowing, and thus he or she is wiser than the professors who confidently claim privileged insight, while competing with one another for the status of academic genius. In these parodies, the academic, whose profession is to communicate and educate, does not make sense (except perhaps for the ears of the critics he or she is referring to). Instead of being dutifully respected, the academic can be laughed down from his or her pedestal. Moreover, the lesson may be more widely applied than academia. The reader may even learn that professing expertise or fostering a sense of hierarchy for the sake of self-promotion (as opposed to the necessity for efficient sub-field communication) is an unwise enterprise. The reader may laugh at the professors in the Crews's parodies, because those professors claim to know a book by simplifying the complex, but if the complex is knowable, then professors, or anyone who claims to confidently know, are

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[275] However, the parodies may fool the unsuspecting reader. Since they imitate contemporary discourse, these parodies can be taken as viable criticism. If the tone was not so deliberate, resting upon their form, these parodies could be altered into legitimate analyses. Alan D. Sokal's, "Transgressing the Boundaries: Towards a Transformative Hermeneutics of Quantum Gravity" demonstrated the power of parody to fool the editors and reviewers of the scholarly journal *Social Text* in 1996. In the tradition of *Candid Camera* or *Punk'd*, Sokal's hoax demonstrated the power of academic jargon. In 2000, Andrew C. Bulhak developed *The Postmodern Generator*, http://www.elsewhere.org/pomo, what is aptly titled a Dada engine. The Dada engine generates random texts from recursive grammars – (the Dada engine on the site itself was modified

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by Josh Larios). Delivering academic style essays, with a mouse click, the site generates the obfuscating jargon that makes academic elitism an easy target of parody.

simple. Inquiry, academic or otherwise, is fuelled by a dynamic of unknowing and knowing. Innovative inquiry involves searching those spaces of uncertainty that challenge thinkers to explore outside what may be intellectually safe (placing one into an established group of respected authorities) or what may be professionally advantageous (promoting one's self as an expert).

> these liars warn't no kings nor dukes, at all, but just low-down humbugs and frauds.
> Mark Twain, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, 142

Conclusion to Serious Intellect

As an alternative to the confident knowing identified and upheld by the intellectual elite, one may sense, despite the comfort provided by polysyllabic insider jargon, there is much more that humans may never know or understand, outside the expertise of any particular field and the accompanying sense of confident cognizant agency. Acquiring field-specific language, adopting academic discourse, and following the advisor from "The Author's Preface" are means to appear capable, for a specific group, within a specific time, and for a particular context. Academic discourse sustains a performance of knowing that guarantees social power; conversely, admitting one does not know may cause a tumble down the cultural hierarchy. Performing a sense of knowing within academia is a social illusion that brings respect and power. Certainty comes with the rules that can identify it. Genius is a symptom of a community who can assess, recognize, and help award or validate both expertness and, reciprocally, the very community conducting the validation. Being an expert is a limiting concept, whose boundaries (and paths to attainment) are drawn by prevailing social standards that may overlook the more uncertain and unknowable aspects of existence.

Conclusion

> Tragedy is when I cut my finger. Comedy is when
> You fall into an open sewer and die.
> Mel Brooks[276]

I. General Conclusion of Research

The introduction and research section provides a guiding question: how and why do humorous texts utilize ambiguity, uncertainty, and multiplicity in those works that comically interrogate the success and esteem of heroic and scholarly manifestations of confident cognizant agency and does such an investigation and the overall articulation of comic nescience add to humour theory? The dissertation provides an extended answer built around the idea of comic nescience.

The introduction provides the groundwork for the dissertation, beginning with the idea of unknowing from Thurber's "University Days." There is a cultural bias against unknowing, for it is often associated with something negative or demeaning. In correlation, a lack of knowing, self-awareness, in particular, is also basic to humour theory. Such a correlation provides a means by which to understand unknowing anew, as something not necessarily negative or deserving of ridicule, but as an integral part of human experience. Because of its negative connotations, a lack of knowing may be something humans are socially afraid to be associated with; yet, it is not without sense to address the human inability to fully know. With such unknowing comes humility, and perhaps a type of wisdom that counters the popular social pressures that champion success, prowess, intelligence, and capability. Unknowing, on its own, however, may have little to offer. Hence, in this study unknowing is one part of a continuum linked with knowing. In fact, as the thesis progresses, other dynamic elements signalling the range of identifying or responding to comical phenomena are presented as non-exclusive, intertwined, and interdependent. The comical may be rooted in the ugly, but there is a beauty to quality comical art. The comical may be a domain of intellect and logic, but, emotion and the illogical are also involved. Indeed, early in the study of funniness, Aristotle voiced a gap between the ideal and the practice that, later, Bergson would speak of, claiming absent-mindedness was the force arising from the tension between utopian obsession and practical agency (http://www.authorama.com/laughter-3.html). Although he does not exclude the emotional, illogical, and unreasonable, Bergson's stress is on intellect, logic, and reason. While Bergson's contribution is canonical, perhaps there is a chance for some expansion via comic nescience.

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[276] From page 48 of Karyn Ruth White's and Jay Arthur's *Your Seventh Sense.*

Place the varying forces side by side and one notices a dual list, a range of possible tensions, beyond ideal and practice. These tensions are not only instructive for the production and appreciation of humour, but they articulate the heart of longstanding debates in comic theory. Theoretically, such tensions may involve some critics treating humour as logical, cognitive, and social, while other critics treat humour as illogical, emotional, and psychological. In terms of artistic creation, such tensions may include expressing hate and love, respect and disrespect, esteem and mockery. For audiences, amusement may derive from a relationship between laughing at and laughing with, noticing the ridiculous or enjoying the ludicrous, or feeling a sense of knowing expectation as well as pleasant surprise. More forces can be added; so, the previous few sentences are far from exhaustive. On that note, the division of the tensions into opposing elements is deliberate, forced, and artificial. In the view of comic nescience, lived experience is too heterogeneous for the clarity of charts. However misleading, through its comfortable clarity, a chart-type of association may be useful, to help explain how the comical may less be the result of one element over another, and more of a range of tensions between elements. In this dissertation, despite the temptation, I choose not to conclude matters by neatly charting such elements, because, at this time, I elect to stress an overall concept, rather than a specific schema.[277] Returning to the dynamic interplay of comical forces, in the general sense, when one reviews the history of comical theory, one may notice varying phrases, such as high/low, aware/unaware, success/failure, buffoon/trickster, capable/incapable, image/actuality, and so on. From the perspective of comic nescience, the interplay of these forces is important to comical art, identifying a range of characteristics of comical material, a range of theoretical stresses, and by focusing on one element more than another, a comically nescient range of interpretive perspectives and possibilities.

Being a dissertation in three fields, literature, film, and broadcast media, interested in humour theory and Anglo-American texts, several key areas were covered. The theoretical survey organized itself around the three major strands of comical theory, superiority/hostility, relief/release, and incongruity. Addressing Attardo's complaint that literary studies tends to stop at re-readings of Freud and Bergson, this survey deliberately presented more than the established encyclopaedic standards in the field. In the theoretical survey, the elusiveness of humour was highlighted, demonstrating this dissertation's overall respect for the elusive element of comical art, laughter, and the nature of mirth. After outlining the research interest, the main thrust of the dissertation proceeded in three steps: comic nescience, the western mythos of success, and serious intellect. The contributions of each will be taken up in the next subsection. Before that, here is a general summary statement.

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[277] In *Semantic Mechanisms of Humor*, Victor Raskin charts the opposing scripts of particular jokes, noting how a joke moves from one expected meaning to the actual meaning provided by the joke's twist, or trigger. The tension between forces, for comic nescience, are larger than those of specific jokes. That is, Raskin is interested in technically locating a switch in meaning. In contrast, with the broader, theoretical interest of comic nescience, the interplay and interaction of forces may lead to multiple meanings.

In conclusion, the perspective of comic nescience is an alternative to understanding funniness, offering the possibility to view comical phenomena as textual embodiments of tensions between often opposing elements, tensions that form the basics of comic nescience. Accepting that a tension between forces exists, the success of such tension (arousing laughter) is uncertain; hence, there is a risky element in comical texts and performances. In addition, completely understanding how and why people (create and) react to the tension (more intellectually or emotionally, laughing at or laughing with) is somewhat uncertain; thus, for comic artists, the art itself is a product of somewhat ambiguous elements, and, for audiences, interpretations can be multiple, contradictory, simultaneous, and overlapping. In other words, despite the comical category, audiences laugh at and laugh with extended comical texts. Fostering ambiguity and a multiplicity of meaning is especially relevant in an American context, a pluralistic society, where both common and competing principles are complicated by disparate practices. In the view of comic nescience, because of the interest in upholding an ideal, the happy ending that structurally identifies traditional comedies may have a function other than closure and ideological containment. From *Rip Van Winkle* to a Bill Cosby routine, in the general sense, some comical works may be striving for an ideal standard, by handling an incongruous reality. Although a singular comical work may not heal an audience and radically alter society, over time, comical works, in conjunction with other artistic and social forces, may work towards change. For instance, although he may not have corrected the problem, Mark Twain may have helped to both historicize and wear out a phrase, that at one time, identified a social reality.[278] Twain is crude and offensive in his use of the term, even shocking. However, more than shock and nastiness are at work. Twain's use of the term honestly acknowledges un-ideal social discourse, in a non-apologetic, and brave manner. Nevertheless, for some, Twain may be a racist, for others, a voice of reason. Some readers may delight in using the racial slur, while others may find it deeply disturbing. Audiences may treat Twain's work as serious and political, or they may treat it as an over-rated adventure. For comic nescience, like many comic artists, Twain is all of this, because his texts foster ambiguity, his characterizations are contradictory, and the response to him is multiple. Surveying the range of texts examined, the artistic attempt for social change may be conservative or subversive or neutral, upholding the status quo or pushing for rebellion or doing neither. Regardless of the political range of possibilities for comical phenomena, funny texts are a part of an argument between an ideal and practice, and other such forces. Comical texts in the American context demonstrate change, discussion, and debate, revealing how democratic society is not fixed. As a result, neither are its comedians . . . although some may wish they were.

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[278] Historicize, because Twain acknowledges the social use of the phrase, so that time period will not be forgotten. Wear out, because Twain uses the phrase excessively.

II. Summary of Chapter Contributions

Building upon the second chapter's survey of comic theory, "Comic Nescience" begins by questioning the exclusivity and totalizing of humour theory and comical categorization, offering the alternative of viewing comical texts in overlapping and contradictory ways. Then, "Comic Nescience" moves away from debates between theorists over the proper definition and appropriate classification of comical texts, in order to recognize how texts may be read in multiple ways and may have overlapping elements of comedy, parody, and satire. Noting that clear definitions are important, "Comic Nescience" believes texts may even foster ambiguous categorization, to make for greater comical possibilities and to warrant a wider range of wider responses. Through a look at Jonathan Swift's "A Modest Proposal," "Comic Nescience" claims comical texts risk being misunderstood and do not always guarantee a clear response. Although in some instances, this may be a small part of comical art, the risk of not arousing laughter and of arousing laughter is an important part of comical texts and performances. The dynamic between understanding and misunderstanding, as well as serious and unserious, are fundamental components of comical art. Next, "Comic Nescience" charts the humour and wit distinction as it relates to class and attitudes towards the ridiculous and of the ludicrous, drawing attention to the value of J. C Gregory's definition. Notions of class and types of humour are too clear-cut for popular culture, where high and low distinctions become blurred. Hence, although this study values the humour and wit distinction, "Comic Nescience" qualifies the difficulty of uniformly identifying a clear division between humour and wit today. Then, alternate to identifying and stressing only one of opposing forces, "Comic Nescience" articulates an overlapping relationship of complementary elements that includes logic and non-logic, intellect and emotion, and the *alazôn* and *eirôn*. "Comic Nescience" moves into qualifying superiority theory, claiming its language (describing the triumph, intelligence, and superiority an individual in comical communication) is exaggerated, overlooking the fact that, being a typical part of North American discourse and being relatively simple in terms of structure, jokes are not too difficult to decipher or anticipate. The fifth and final section stresses America in three ways. One, America is a pluralistic nation, which may affect the production and reception of comical works. Two, American comedy is concerned with the tension between principle and practice. Three, because America itself can be positioned as an ideal, the happy end in American comedy is never reached; rather, each American comical text studied is part of a democratic argument over the gap or lack of a gap between various ideals and practices.

The "Western Mythos of Success" explores language, the Alger myth, and racism in an effort to navigate a cultural tradition that considers laziness and ignorance to be natural faults in an individual that can explain his or her lack of status.[279] *Don Quixote* and *The Gold Rush* demonstrate the close, intertwined relationship between relating to comical characters in a dual fashion, telescopic and microscopic. While the distanced view keeps re-asserting itself, allowing audiences to laugh at the characters, audiences also feel the magnification of the emotional struggle embodied by Quixote and Chaplin.[280] The next section handles Alger through glimpses into Benjamin Franklin, *Rip*

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[279] At its worst, the notion of lesser and incapable human beings has helped institutionalize racism, slavery, genocide, and eugenics.

[280] Acknowledging the nescient element of comical also points to how a joke may be multi-layered for even one audience member. Chaplin's Tramp, for instance, is at once a target to be ridiculed and a social criticism to be applauded, as well as a playfully absurd visual. The Tramp walks and wears clothes improperly, so he can be ridiculed for such eccentricities. The Tramp is a homeless person, so he is an

Van Winkle, and *Huck Finn*. In such texts, there may be layers of elements to laugh at (Rip Van Winkle as comic antithesis to hardworking individual; Rip Van Winkle as anti-American; Rip Van Winkle as social critique of the hen-pecked, cowardly patriarch). Alternatively, there may be layers to laugh with (Rip Van Winkle as poorer route to life of leisure enjoyed by the rich; Rip Van Winkle as American individualist; Rip Van Winkle as social critique of self-serving behaviour, regardless of wealth). Because of these opposing, but simultaneous, elements, there is a consistent enough duality to warrant the identification of comic nescience within the texts examined. Identifying the comical for its more uncertain quality is important because it points to the way, for instance, a single joke may echo across different audiences within a pluralistic America. This chapter closes by looking at the issue of race in *Robinson Crusoe*, Cosby's "The Lone Ranger" routine, and *Huck Finn*. The two-tier culture of racism in American history illustrates how the ideal of equality dramatically failed in practice, with such hypocrisy fuelling some American comedy.

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unsuccessful fool, possibly harbouring all that the popular conception of the Alger myth despises, such as laziness, stupidity, and incapability. We may laugh at him, because we hate such qualities. At the same time, the Tramp may serve a cathartic purpose, a safe way to laugh at such elements, while not turning that laughter into hatred, because we also care for the Tramp. He is an endearing character, whose resiliency and comic performances distinguish him from the nameless homeless person that lives down the street and begs for money. In this way, the Tramp is not a tramp at all. He is simply a character, whom we may enjoy for his clownish dress and foolish antics. Then again, the Tramp's comedy may harbour serious social criticism. While laughing at poverty and unfairness may help one cope with the inequities of the world, such laughter may serve as persuasion to critique a world where a man needs to risk his life for money or where some are driven to such desperate hunger that a shoe makes for a decent meal. Beyond charting the historical sources that contribute towards the concept of the successful agent, the examples and reflections in this chapter illustrate how the comic cannot be easily reduced to one clear target or one obvious meaning – even though we may be tempted to contain matters by simply saying that we get the joke or comic moment. Conceivably, comic artistry may depend upon layers that cultivate a particular amount of uncertainty or nescience. Perhaps, the propensity for simply associating jokes with insults may be more a result of a cultural or political framework, or even a tradition of understanding jokes and humour as simplistic and crude, rather than an appreciation for the artistry or craft of a joke and the multiple ways an audience or an individual may experience a comic moment.

"Serious Intellect," begins by establishing the cultural value of intellect, offering criticism of the university as an elitist institution harbouring secret or complex knowledge in Heywood Broun's "The Fifty-First Dragon," and offering criticism of the power of logic in Max Shulman's "Love is a Fallacy." Then, elitism is further explored by Thurber in "University Days." Finally, the academic persona is interrogated through a look at Frederick Crews's "Paradoxical Persona."

Overall, in chapters five and six, the varying comical interrogations should demonstrate an ongoing process of questioning an ideal and its relation to practice. The successful individual is more complex than Alger implies. However, the complexity fostered by academic discourse and image is easier to decipher than imagined, especially if one recognizes education as the process of explaining ideas and providing all students the skills necessary to excel.

III. Wider Possibilities of Research

In general, there may be five major possibilities for the future study of comical texts. One, comic nescience may illustrate the need to address comical texts as organic social phenomenon, that exist as vibrant entities reflecting upon, reinforcing, or subverting various cultural ideals, beliefs, or prejudices in a non-uniform manner for pluralistic societies or audiences with differing sense of humour. Two, treating comical phenomena as built upon a dynamic range of opposing forces leading to uncertainty, ambiguity, or multiplicity may help scholars see beyond the limits of the three major theories, or the major comical categories. Scholars may appreciate how laughter may arise from multiple, simultaneous, and opposing forces. For instance, the comical in some instances may be reduced to one dominant force, in other instances, to two opposing force, and, in still other instances, to a multitude of forces and corresponding variety of interpretations. Three, establishing comic nescience as an inclusive perspective and positioning America as a pluralistic utopian comedy may help researchers qualify the study of some Anglo-American texts, offering multiple and overlapping readings that speak to varied audiences in both diverse and uniform ways. Four, researchers may find the investigation of cultural forces (language, Alger, and race) related to popular conceptions of success and failure valuable to education. Understanding the way success and failure, or winning and losing developed may help educators foster cooperative classrooms of equal access and respect, reducing the possibility of an informal hierarchy amongst students. Five, scholars may find the exploration of the academic persona as a valuable means to re-imagine the academic as someone less cut off from his or her wider community or students, yet still engaged in complex research and discussion within university culture.

Overall, I wish this dissertation helped enrich the study of humour theory, as well as the comical interrogation of the hero and the scholar. Even more importantly, referring to the conclusion's opening quote by Mel Brooks, I pray the sheer uselessness of the thesis remains undiscovered. That is, I hope no one figures out that despite all the writing and reading, comedy is actually quite simple, and thus, there is no need for this dissertation. Mel Brooks did explain it best, and much more succinctly, without having to thumb through hundreds of pages, further risking the chance of a paper cut.

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Appendix One: Long Live the Hero, the Hero is Dead

Hollywood cinema is but one part of a vast cultural meaning-making network of patriarchal social forces, including for instance, the family, the workplace, the educational system, business, the sciences, the arts, language, literature, radio, music, television, magazines, video games, fashion, and advertising. This is not to say that all of these social forces inject subjects with the hypodermic needle of patriarchal indoctrination; rather, it is to say that none of these forces work alone. Taking culture to signify what "we" (as social beings) live within a particular time and space, then these social forces, like us, are similarly alive and open to change. In this way, patriarchal ideology is a living force, adjusting across different time periods, but nonetheless, forming a very particular and identifiable lineage of power relations and identity construction. The construction of manliness is not an isolated or static process, limited to one type of immutable social force; similarly, the construction of normative masculinity by Hollywood films is inexorably linked to a myriad of other patriarchal socializing elements within North American culture. In terms of constructing manliness, Hollywood's role within this vast network is primarily through its preservation of the hierarchical patriarchal binary via ancient warrior values and the ritualistic manifestation of the American mythic delivered by its heroic figures.

Discussing the role of Hollywood's construction of manliness from both a mythic and ideological perspective may be directed into several possible directions; however, this study focuses upon the dynamic process of patriarchal naturalization via Hollywood hero-making. Necessarily then, the study will begin by addressing Hollywood's historical power and taking a glimpse at the critical extremes associated with media socialization. Next, Hollywood will be situated as an interactive meaning-making site, where heroic manliness exists as a process of ideological participation in the hierarchical binary. Hollywood's role in the construction of manliness will be defined as an ideological naturalization process occurring on two overlapping levels, the macro and the micro. The macro-level process takes a sociofunctionalist view of myth, explains the importance of the ancient patriarchal warrior hero, and demonstrates the way patriarchal narrative bias organizes the discourse of human knowledge (with references to anthropology and science). Next, taking mythic narrative to be the creative bridge between ideology and naturalization, Blazina's paradigm theory will be explained in order to demonstrate how the male warrior ideal re-constitutes itself in contemporary Hollywood. Moving into the micro-level process, the emphasis shifts to a particularly American naturalization of patriarchy, proving the role of Campbell's basic monomyth as well as Lawrence and Jewett's more specifically American monomyth in Hollywood. With a particular emphasis on the role of the central male in the heroic monomyth, certain character traits associated with Hollywood manliness will be proven with examples in three micro-level areas. One, the manly duty to cleanse the social space of any disrupting and dangerous influence in the basic Hollywood pattern of order, disorder, and order restored will be discussed, with a special nuance by way of highlighting the hero's perpetual pain (which will be picked up again during the conclusion). Two, male self-worth will be tied into the standard dictated by the American dream, the self-made man's hard work and good ethics leading to material and social success. Three, a careful look into the defining function of violent social transgression will complete the micro-level naturalization process of manliness. Here, *The Gladiator* will serve as a summarizing example of the way ideal manliness is constructed by Hollywood. Finally, the study into Hollywood's role in the construction of manliness will appropriately conclude by picking up the function of pain in the hero and utilizing the summary text of *The Gladiator* as an example of how narrative closure functions for the manly hero. Situating normative heroic texts (like *The Gladiator*) in Hollywood as simultaneously open (evading what is often mistakenly seen as classical narrative closure and heroic triumph) and closed (tying up the seemingly loose ends of the goal-oriented plot) the process of masculine socialization will prove to be an ongoing one, an infinite signifier, sliding from text to text, from hero to hero.

In order to situate this discussion, the pervasive economic, social, and political power of Hollywood needs to be placed into a historical perspective. Hollywood is a system of entertainment that has dominated and continues to influence -- either financially, artistically, or both – movie theatres and media around the world. Over the past one hundred years, as a profit-seeking business focused upon delivering popular cinematic entertainment, Hollywood's cultural influence is unparalleled. From the rise of seamlessly edited narrative fiction films the world over to the deliberate reactions against its form, style, and industry, Hollywood is a locus for understanding cinema's relationship to culture. Over the past century, despite various technological changes and structural adjustments to its functioning as a business and narrative form, Hollywood remains a relatively unified marker of American popular culture. The popularity of Chaplin, Valentino, and Douglas Fairbanks signals the early power of Hollywood, which reached an infamous peak during the studio era. The 1930s to the 1950s mark a time of almost legendary power for the studios, however to assume that the studio era was the climax of Hollywood's cultural influence is a mistake. With the rise of blockbuster productions (*Jaws* and *Star Wars*) in the 1970s and the subsequent merchandising of movie memorabilia, Hollywood continues to play a central role in the everyday lives of people across North America. In recent years, Gomery in "Hollywood as Industry" asserts, the media conglomerates "which dominate contemporary Hollywood now possess a power and a cohesion against which the oligopoly of the Hollywood studios during the 1930s and 1940s simply pales in comparison" (252). Today, in the era of conglomeration and synergy, film production companies, television stations, radio networks, and publishing houses are closely interconnected. The television talk show industry, for instance, is built around promoting stars in their upcoming films; often these films make their way into fast food restaurant promotions, children's merchandizing, and other cross-promotional venues. Even after films have completed their theatrical release, nowadays, DVDs with extra features can out gross a film's initial run. Put simply, Hollywood's power is a cross-cultural, multi-media, and inter-business affair. In total, Gomery claims Americans watch 250 billion hours of television and film each year: "If we take the average hourly wage in the United States to be about $10, we come to a couple of trillion dollars of time invested" (253). During these hours of leisurely entertainment, not only is time well wasted, but cultural socialization also occurs.

Hollywood gender socialization is complex and multifarious, in part because of its status as a vehicle for dominant ideology and, in part, because of the various interpretive possibilities of a pluralistic audience. For instance, while Screen theory, especially the work of Heath and McCabe, figures the audience as passive vessels of a text's ideology, the works of Morley or Hodge and Tripp suggest, as Fiske in *Television Culture* puts it, "the actual television viewer is a primarily social subject. This social subjectivity is more influential in the construction of meanings than the textually produced subjectivity which exists only at the moment of reading" (62). Cultural Studies' ethnographic acknowledgment can be applied to the film viewer. For instance, rather than only figuring the viewer under the powerfully universalizing paradigm of Lacanian psychology, as for instance Easthope privileges in *What a Man's Gotta Do*, acknowledging the ethnographic complexity of a spectator and the role of sociology in cultural meaning-making systems helps revise the way dominant ideology functions. Patriarchal ideology does not function in isolation or without negotiation, and even resistance. While the Marxist dupe, the spectator is pacified by the ideological state apparatus of cinema, may illustrate one extreme, fan culture studies for instance, by Jenkins in *Textual Poachers* illustrate the other extreme. Unlike the passive sponge-like viewer, the highly active spectator may creatively produce his or her own narratives from the very same cinematic source. (Moreover, a spectator's level of passivity or activity is not entirely dependent upon a text's level of mimetic realism or self-disclosing reflexivity). Depending upon a multiple array of variables, ranging from social class and political beliefs to personal taste and emotional mood at the time of viewing, a particular film can have a wide range of effects upon a spectator. It is not the intent of this study to engage in either identifying Hollywood cinema as a site of one-sided ideological indoctrination or as an avenue for analyzing differing audience attitudes.

Rather, this study configures Hollywood cinema within the space between such extremes. In between its role as a powerful capitalistic force and its role as an interactive site open enough for polysemic flexibility, Hollywood is a necessarily interactive meaning-making site. Interactive in the limited sense that Hollywood needs to serve audience interests (even shape them to varying degrees via award programs, advertising, criticism, and so on) in order to achieve business success. As evident by its financial motivation to respond to and be aware of audience demands, each generation requires films, stars, and heroes that are relevant enough, at least, to draw audiences with disposable income. Hollywood products are low-risk investments, in the sense that projects are often only produced if there is a built-in projected audience. Hence, established playwrights (from Shakespeare to Mamet) and authors (from Dickens and Twain to Fleming and King), with proven success and notoriety in their respective fields increase the potential for drawing a built-in film audience. Consider, for instance, the recent success of the *Harry Potter* or *Lord of the Rings* films. There is a multiple "star" appeal associated with these works (author, director, actors) that help guarantee a producer's investments – all other elements being equal, the more "stars," the safer the investment. That star may be a bankable actor, director, or writer, or (less acknowledged in such a manner), it may be the star appeal of a successful character type, narrative style, or plot pattern. For instance, while the epic quest and its heroes have made their way to television and movie screens (as direct adaptations), what is more common across genres and generations is the typical quest-oriented narrative depicting a heroic male protagonist, a cultural signifier of normative masculinity.

Hollywood manliness, although variable and at times self-critical, feeds into the vast social network of the normative North American patriarchal binary. To define, according to Leach's "Politics of Masculinity," masculinity is "a form of ideology, in that it presents a set of cultural ideals that define appropriate roles, values and expectations for and of men" (36). To modify Leach, masculinity need not apply only to men. As Benyon points out in *Masculinities and Culture*, "If gender is cultural, then it follows that women as well as men can step into and inhabit (whether permanently or temporarily) masculinity as a 'cultural space', one with its own sets of behaviours" (7). In *Gender Trouble*, Butler agrees, saying, "*gender* is not a noun, but neither is it a set of free-floating attributes, for we have seen that the substantive effect of gender is performatively produced and compelled by regulatory practices of gender coherence" (25). American sociologist Ervin Goffman's *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* explores how people function as social actors in everyday life, adopting various social scripts and performing their social selves. According to Benyon, critics like Butler see gender as a "Goffmanesque presentation" or dramaturgical accomplishment (11). Manliness is a process of ideological participation. In "Politics of Masculinity," Leach demonstrates masculinity's relation to the process of social naturalization in the following manner:

> Most importantly, masculinity is not 'natural'. Unlike the biological state of maleness, masculinity is a gender identity constructed socially, historically and politically. It is the cultural interpretation of maleness, learnt through participation in society and its institutions . . . Ideologically loaded assumptions are thereby bestowed the uncontestable status of 'the natural'. (36-37)

Socially circulating normative standards and performances of gender then, reinforce the system of binary opposition (masculine versus feminine) and hierarchy (masculine traits as more valuable than feminine traits).

Through its heroic standard of masculinity, Hollywood participates in the social meaning-making system, naturalizing and re-naturalizing what is considered manly. In *Film, Form, and Culture*, Kolker sums up the process in the following way:

> From the natural comes the mythic; from myths come culture; from culture comes the notion that what was invented by the human imagination is real, even natural. In the end, reality is what we make out of what goes on in the natural and human worlds, what we invest with meaning and incorporate into our culture. Science is one meaning-making narrative; so are myth and literature. Film is another. (xv)

Taken as a part of such a process, Hollywood cinema is a contemporary myth-making system. The following axiom based on Kolker – from nature comes myth; from myth comes culture; from culture comes "nature" – serves as an appropriate orientation point for understanding the complex Hollywood socialization process of manliness on a macro-level and on a micro-level.

On the macro-level, the axiom's first line "from nature to myth" refers to the ancient anthropological relationship between humans and nature, whereby mythic narrative emerges as a sense-making system, explaining the human relationship to the mysteries of the natural, supernatural, and social (including gender) realms. Using the turn-of-the-century sociofunctionalist view of myth and ritual, Doty in *Mythography* defines the mythic function as a fundamentally social one, as "providing the social cement that binds societies together" (137). In this manner, "myths and rituals mean culture, *mean* social structure and interaction, and a sociofunctionalist view stresses the way they bring about and sustain the social worlds of their performers" (137). On the grand historical level then, Hollywood manliness is rooted in the ancient, dating back to the standards exemplified by the warrior-ethos of oral epics, the founding myths of western civilization.

To digress for a moment, the creative potential for myth needs to be addressed. In terms of an anthropological critique, the sociofunctionalist view underplays the polysemic function of myth. That is, an oral epic poem, almost by definition of its orality, may interact with audiences in a wide range of ways. So, this study's emphasis on the patriarchal warrior bias in such texts is deliberate, but not arbitrary, for three significant reasons. One, these texts have a canonical significance; they have directly or indirectly influenced other literary and narrative forms. Epic poems form the founding myths of a culture, establishing the founding-father figure, for instance, of Aeneas for Italy. Two, these ancient poems of heroic deeds associate male honour with qualities such as warrior prowess, strength, and virility – qualities that have prevailed as standards of manliness until today. On that note, three, these texts in large part can only be viewed in terms of how they speak to contemporary meaning-making systems of gender and masculine values. Understanding such texts and their relationship to the present may help elucidate the difficulty of reforming the naturalization process. Conversely, revisions in the interpretation of such epics may help point to a less stereotypical understanding of what it is to be manly or womanly. Because of their emphasis on the warrior ideal, ancient oral epics influence the goal-oriented Hollywood man.

Getting back to the foundational meaning-making basis of western myth, patriarchal ideological naturalization by such narrative is so pervasive as to blur the distinctions between anthropology and narrative, science and social subjectivity. In terms of anthropology, work by Gimbutas in *The Language of the Goddess* and *The Living Goddesses* hypothesizes a pre-warrior proliferation of matriarchal culture, where fertility goddesses, revered for their life-giving power, were worshipped. Whether or not the claim of Gimbutas is scientifically correct does not matter, but what is certain is that the human anthropological past is shrouded in mystery. In large part, the patriarchal narrative orientation of the present decides what anthropology is more valuable. If it ever existed, the narrative of matriarchal society has been lost and thus, so goes a great deal of its anthropological validity. Contemporary "common-sense" (in Gramsci's terms) beliefs of the past are inexorably viewed through the prevailing patriarchal lens, orienting contemporary understandings of human origin. If anthropological evidence points to matriarchal power resting in the creation of biological life, patriarchal power rests in the social creation of nations and, for that matter, destroying life – the very notions codified in founding cultural myths. Re-enacting nation-building myths of masculinity reinforce the pseudo-scientific inclination of male supremacy. Patriarchal bias even infiltrates science, a discourse signifying objectivity. For instance, Sussman in "The Myth of Man the Hunter/Man the Killer" points out the clumsy and biased intermingling of morality, sociobiology, and evolutionary concepts. Similarly, Martin's "The Egg and the Sperm: How Science Has Constructed a Romance" discusses how even reproductive biology may rely "on stereotypes central to our cultural definitions of male and female" (151). Whether or not Gimbutas is correct in assuming human civilization finds an ancient basis in matriarchal social structures, it is necessary to make an important admission: the work by Gimbutas, Sussman, and Martin points to the social pervasiveness of naturalized patriarchal ideology. If the origins of human life, anthropologically and scientifically, are mysterious, then bias of the patriarchal perspective helps to ideologically organize human knowledge.

Hence, the historical power of myth – the imaginative bridge between ideology and naturalization, between social belief and socialization. Alternatively, as Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation* puts it, "Myth expresses ideology in a narrative," resonating a "trans-historical consciousness" (6). In *The Cultural Myth of Masculinity*, Blazina charts how anthropological Indo-European masculinity, rooted in warrior culture, forms the basis of western manliness, echoing through the ages by way of ideological absorption and re-absorption. Modifying the Hegelian dialectic and Kuhn's explanation of scientific paradigms to demonstrate how hegemonic masculinity works over long stretches of history, Blazina sees "that a culture has one dominant set of masculine ideals that are reflected within the most dominant forms of mythology" (xiv). Dominant models for masculinity "are created, challenged, and replaced over time" (xv). While Kuhn in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* emphasizes how one scientific paradigm inevitably disproves and replaces another, Blazina emphasizes the inevitable continuation of traditional notions of manliness in the following manner:

> cultural paradigms of masculinity compete and are replaced while still allowing for the blending of material from the old mode with the new one. That is, the old paradigm of masculinity does not entirely disappear. If compatible, aspects of the old paradigm continue in the new hegemonic model. This new model continues its cultural task by providing masculine icons and methods of socialization for men. (xv)

By noting the re-constitution of past standards into newer cultural standards for normative masculinity, Blazina claims patriarchy continually roots itself even deeper. On the macro-level then, the "from nature comes myth" equation refers to the very origins of the patriarchal world-view (of binary and hierarchical masculinity) and its successful naturalization and re-naturalization over time, weathering the effects of social change by reconstituting itself as normative and ideal.

On the micro-level, the "from nature comes myth" axiom refers to the particularly American process of naturalization. In the interest of national identity construction, with its emphasis upon democratic ideals, (an early form of) capitalism, and individual rights, the American mythic lays its social cement. The following section will look at the particularly American mythic influence with reference to relevant Hollywood examples. As argued in Sehmby's *Professional Wrestling* (and structuring the following section), Cambell's hero cycle is made particularly American through an emphasis on the social quest for a utopia, the individual (and familial) desire for the American dream, and the individual's capacity for violence (121). In *Hero With a Thousand Faces*, Campbell briefly defines the monomyth in the following manner:

> the mythological adventure of the hero is a magnification of the formula represented in the rites of passage: *separation—initiation—return*: which might be named the nuclear unit of the monomyth. *A hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder: fabulous forces are there encountered and a decisive victory is won: the hero comes back from this mysterious adventure with the power to bestow boons on his fellow man.* (30)

The hero, in Campbell's assertion has divine or semi-divine connections, something that is not necessarily the case in Hollywood conceptions of ideal manliness. Nevertheless, superhuman behaviour is certainly within the range of the Hollywood ideal.

For an example demonstrating Campbell, consider the opening sequence of *Goldeneye*, from the extremely successful James Bond franchise. In it, Bond dives from the side of a huge dam. The image of a fearless man with the monumental human technological achievement of a water dam behind him dominates the screen. Bond flies fearless downwards, as a sort of test-run, it seems, for what is to come. A few moments later, after planting some explosives and drawing the attention of what seems to be an army, Bond is calmly racing on motorbike towards a plane taking to the air. This time Bond dives off of a cliff, without a bungee chord, hurling towards the flying plane. Bond climbs in, gets rid of the pilot, and just before the face of a looming mountain, veers the plane out of danger and escapes. The scene ends with the spectacle of a giant explosion – mission accomplished. While Bond is no semi-divine figure, he asserts a prowess over nature and dexterity with technology that would amaze even Hercules and Achilles. Or in Hollywood, Bond's heroism would certainly impress even the official superheroes, like Superman, Spiderman, and Batman. Figures such as Bond display not only a physical prowess and fearlessness, but also, as often demonstrated in the proliferation of detective and lawyer types of television, an uncanny sense for science, logic, and even intuition, in his quest to defeat the culprit. Manliness in Hollywood celebrates the prowess and proficiency of the male body and mind as problem-solving entities.

Returning to the hero cycle, forming an integral part of the foundational stories of cultures across the world, Campbell demonstrates the many variations of the heroic quest. In part, this is due to anthropological evidence regarding similar warrior cultures and patriarchal social structures. In addition, such widespread evidence of the monomyth is also due to the simplistic nature of its tripartite structure; that is, while there is anthropological evidence of such warrior societies, the monomyth itself is so open as to lend itself to a wide variety of narratives. While a simple definition of the monomyth aids in recognizing cross-cultural similarities, a potential danger is downplaying cultural differences. Hence, there arises the necessity for historical and cultural specification. For instance, Lawrence and Jewett in *Myth of the American Superhero* distinguish the contemporary American variation of the hero cycle as follows:

> Whereas the classical monomyth seemed to reflect rites of initiation, the American monomyth derives from tales of redemption. It secularizes the Judeo-Christian dramas of community redemption that have arisen on American soil, combining elements of the selfless servant who impassively gives his life for others and the zealous crusader who destroys evil. (6)

Lawrence and Jewett's emphasis on the pseudo-religious saviour is demonstrated effectively, however it downplays the complicated tension between warrior and society (as will be discussed shortly). Campbell along with Lawrence and Jewett point towards Hollywood's basic narrative pattern of order, chaos, and order restored. In part, this appears so basic because its structure, like the monomyth itself (or Aristotle's seemingly simplistic claim that a plot has a beginning, middle and end), has been effectively naturalized as part of our normative method of telling stories, of making narrative sense.

The order and order-restored bookends of the basic pattern are built upon the American belief in itself as a potential utopia, relating specifically to the hero's task in nation building. Regarded as a potential utopia, early in its history, America begins its symbolic reverence for the wild frontier, as Turner argues in *Frontier*:

> American social development has been continually beginning over again on the frontier. This perennial rebirth, this fluidity of American life, this expansion westward with its new opportunities, its continuous touch with the simplicity of primitive society, furnish the forces dominating American character. (131)

The frontier in Hollywood is a microcosm for a nation, where it can be a literal frontier (as in westerns) or a metaphorical frontier; in either case, the frontier is defended from corrupting influences by heroic manliness. The frontier is a powerful symbol of Hollywood and American myth-making and patriarchal ideology. Slotkin in *Gunfighter Nation* says, "*Ideology* is the basic system of beliefs, and values that defines a society's way of interpreting its place in the cosmos and the meaning of its history" (5). In relation to ideology, myths "have acquired through persistent usage the power of symbolizing that society's ideology and of dramatizing its moral consciousness" (5). In this way, symbolizing American ideology through a historical icon, the frontier is a blank slate for a new beginning and the promise of what is to come, an America pure and free of any corrupting influence. For instance, the frontier is a potential Eden unblemished by the class bias demonstrated by the British forefathers. In Hollywood, the frontier can be a plane that is taken over by terrorists, because a clean space has been violated by the threatening Other. Or, a town infiltrated by aliens. In this way, Hollywood's manifestation of the frontier continually re-constitutes the binary playing field where manly prowess can be demonstrated. Where the frontier can be re-claimed and a pseudo-nation re-claimed.

Hollywood obsessively ritualizes the hero's role in the order, chaos, and order-restored pattern. For example, Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* holds a monumental place in the history of cinema not only due to its technical prowess or racist controversy, but also because the film feeds into this very powerful notion of America as a potential utopia. The film's claim that ridding the United States of "the negro" and the "mulatto" via the crusading heroes, the Ku Klux Klan, demonstrates the way such racist propaganda utilizes elements of founding myths – (elements traceable, for instance, to *Chanson de Roland*). In *Birth of a Nation*, the Civil War's complex dynamics of race, slavery, and economics, is reduced to a proven mythic pattern that ever since *Birth of a Nation*, echoes throughout cinematic-telling. Nearer the end of the 20th century, in a less overtly racist manner, Gibson's *Braveheart* aims to rid Scotland of the corrupting English. Regardless of the partisan leanings of either work, such a narrative-justified world-view implies a belief in the binary of insider versus outsider and an almost superstitious belief that ridding a space of a real or imagined source of corruption will guarantee a utopian future. Aside from the nation building inclinations of historical epics, the typical action film also follows such a format. For instance, a peaceful dinner party turns into a crime thriller until the protagonist solves the case, redeems himself, and calms things down again in *The Fugitive*. Here, the corrupting influence is a business associate who partakes in pharmaceutical fraud. Fortunately, the star hero, Harrison Ford restores hegemonic order to big business and American medicine, smoothing over any fears or mistrust of drug companies. In all of the above cases, the hero is equipped with a high degree of agency, able to alter the world through his physical and mental prowess, and thus re-establish the patriarchal order.

The order restored in *Birth*, *Braveheart*, and *Fugitive* is never a holistic order – the golden past is often forever lost, if it ever existed. Folklorist Zipes in "Oz as American Myth" refers to the land of Oz, from Baum's *The Wizard of Oz* and the movie of the same name, as an imagined space central to the American mythic's search for utopia, as "everything America did not become" (119). Before the post-war anxiety was expressed in Hollywood cinema, the out-of-reach social utopia America promises to be but never sustains is already a fundamental dynamic of the American mythic, especially in relation to male trauma. In this way, unresolved pain and suffering are necessary characteristics of heroic manliness. To explain, consider the common reading of Film Noir and the more specific critical reading provided by Silverman's feminist psychoanalysis of post-war (1944-1947) cinema in *Male Subjectivity*. In the 1940s, Film Noir's stylistic throwback to dark German Expressionist mise-en-scene and thematic concerns of paranoia and the siren-like femme fatale is commonly associated with the social paranoia deriving from war and the increased public power of women in the workplace. In a kindred manner, Silverman says many post-war films "attest with unusual candor to the castrations through which the male subject is constituted – to the pound of flesh which is his price of entry into the symbolic order, as well as to the other losses that punctuate his history" (52). As with the tendency to read Noir, Silverman's focus on the post-war period locates social anxiety through exhibitions of male anxiety in Hollywood. These critical treatments, however valid, of particular periods (post-Vietnam is another popular one) as expressions of fractured masculinity obscure the role of loss inherent in Hollywood manliness, in those films outside such historically significant war and post-war moments. Shifting the emphasis away from highlighting the difference of such expressions of social trauma in film history to foregrounding their similarities, consider the constant presence of fractured masculinity in *Birth*, *Braveheart*, and *Fugitive*. Despite the display of heroic agency, in each case, pain sparks the heroic quest and by the end, although some social order is re-established, the hero's pain lives on – masculinity remains fractured. The Southern military fails to gain sovereignty. William Wallace dies, unable to live free on his homeland. Doctor Richard Kimbel cannot bring back his wife. This wounded masculinity, the heroic sacrifice carried into the supposed restoration of order, becomes the strongest driving force in the hero's quest for both the idea of utopia (forever slipping from the hero's grasp) and the development of the hero himself. Even if victorious and alive, like Luke Skywalker (who loses his uncle, aunt, and home village) or Han Solo (who, as a fugitive, is without a home) in the original *Star Wars* saga, the hero carries with him a certain symbolic martyrdom. Even after victory, the scars of the original loss remain. Hollywood manliness then, comes with scars that initiate the hero into action, but never heal once social order is restored. Inherently, in a circular fashion, so long as there is loss, there is an elevated role for the hero, as the traumatized saviour. Within Hollywood cinema, the ritualistic striving for order restored is a continual becoming, a move towards an ideal that although reached by the end of one film, collapses by the time audiences venture to another film, where, often inevitably, the pattern repeats itself – (more on this concept near the end).

The search for, if not a social utopia, at least individual success, is manifested in the philosophy of the American dream – a more attainable goal than social utopia. Developed through the McGuffey readers and Horatio Alger stories, the American dream equation of hard work plus good ethics leading to material and social success becomes a defining marker of American identity, especially American masculinity. Explaining the origins of the American dream stories in U.S. education, in *The Hero in America*, Wector draws attention to the fact that "The McGuffey Readers, used in thirty-seven states of the Union from 1836 down to the close of the nineteenth century, sold the fabulous number of 122,000,000 copies. It is hard to exaggerate their effect upon the mind and culture of America . . ." (124). Based upon such an influence, manly self-worth in Hollywood stems from the ability for an underdog to overcome all odds and achieve material and social success. This desire for capitalistic success is a common part of movie morality, with the greedy, power-hungry, and selfish (those without Alger's good ethics) ending up defeated or punished in such Hollywood classics as *Greed*, *Citizen Kane*, or *Scarface*.[281] Directly or indirectly, critically or uncritically, many films deal with the American dream, with *Rocky* being a more uplifting version and reiteration of hard work leading towards personal victory and social success. The missing element with *Rocky*, and other such films, is that our hero, as both hardworking sportsman and paid thug, is more morally ambiguous than Alger originally intended schoolboys to be.

Nevertheless, for the American mythic, moral ambiguity is not so unusual. Consider, for example, John Wayne in *Stagecoach*, who is introduced as a fugitive outlaw, but performs bravely as a hero and by the end, runs away with another social outcast, a prostitute, to most likely create their own utopia. With a proliferation of cowboys and gangsters, Hollywood manliness is, at first glance, a seemingly odd mix of moral purity and outlaw transgression, of social service and violent rebellion. A closer look reveals however, that the tension between social service (linking to the Greek origins of the word hero) and anti-social assertions has a long lineage in defining manliness. Quite possibly, this anti-social tendency is rooted in the rise of male warrior culture over the ancient matriarchal society studied by Gimbutas. Assuming a matriarchal civilization preceded the patriarchal, the matriarchal then would be associated with the social realm, whereas the male warrior would be associated with the border territories, that space in between the civilized and the barbarian, the social and the wild.

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[281] *Citizen Kane* is one of the most important films to come out of Hollywood. Although it is primarily applauded for its technical achievements or for its notorious link with Howard Hughes, the film is also a major reflection of the American dream and the nature of storytelling.

The anti-social tendency of the manly may be a throwback to an anti-matriarchal civilizing influence. Speaking of the Indo-European roots of heroic manliness, Blazina in *Cultural Myth* cites Dumezil with the following: "Although an important part of the society, the warrior is a constant worry because he has the potential to overstep the bounds of bellicosity" (Dumezil 1970). Even good warriors were liable to fall into wrongdoing" (3). Performing as killers, warriors are, literally and figuratively, on the brink of the social landscape, applauded and necessary to sustain tribal or national boundaries, but simultaneously unable to venture too far away from that marginal space between such borders. Referring to Eastwood's *Unforgiven*, Sarat, in "When Memory Speaks," admits, "In the end, violence is done, more bodies are rendered lifeless, more corpses left to decay, more ghosts are left to haunt memory. And, at the conclusion of the film, Munny has disappeared, abandoning yet again his life, in search of a new frontier" (328). Although the film may question certain aspects of vigilant justice, with the climactic finale, the legend of Eastwood's heroic star persona remains in tact – the outlaw rebel hero lives on. Male heroes, past and present, are sites of contradiction and at times, serious self-reflection. (Consider, for instance, the legendary ruminations by Aeneas or the personal pain and injustice embodied by Achilles).

One very important element that complicates the moral purity associated with the order, chaos, and order restored pattern and the American dream is this: violence. The violent dime novel, in *The Hero in America*, according to Wector, "played a real part in the wartime psychology of the North. They were sent to camps by the millions, it is said, often bound in bales" (343). Wector describes such novels as "grounded in rugged individualism, exalting the poor against the rich, the self-made against the silver spoon, the purity of the country against the shame of cities" (343). The Oscar-winning *Gladiator* presents us with a hero who, after his wife and child are killed, becomes driven to revenge. A hard-working and loyal military general, Maximus, is betrayed and then enslaved as a gladiator, made poor and subordinate. Fighting for survival, the ethical and mistreated hero works his way to social fame and material success, ending up in a climactic battle where the hero must face the rich and powerful Emperor. The rebellious hero defeats the social authority figure and then the wounded hero himself dies, all the while dreaming of a life with his wife and child in the countryside. *Gladiator* is an ancient Roman version of a man achieving the order and success that come both with violent warrior martyrdom and the American dream, reaching the heavenly state supplied by the nuclear family in the frontier of the "suburban" countryside. On the micro-level, the "from nature comes myth" equation, by using *Gladiator* as a recent popular example, Blazina's notion of new paradigms (American dream of utopian suburban sanctity) of ideal masculinity carrying forth the standards of preceding paradigms (violently tragic warriorhood) is thus achieved.

Gladiator's superimposition of a trans-historical martyrdom with a particularly American nuclear family reverie is especially notable, because it typifies Hollywood closure as not only the success of the hero, but also because Hollywood closure is the simultaneous embodiment of the transcendent and infinite signifier. Through his hard work, fearlessness, and decency, the great gladiator Maximus violently and virtuously achieves ideal manliness. By ridding Rome of the socially malignant emperor, the gladiator's self-sacrifice restores order. Moreover, he transcends the harsh world that tests and breaks down men, by meeting his wife and child in the golden afterlife. In *Film, Form, and Culture*, Kolker declares:

> More than simply ending a story, the act of closure brings back into harmony and balance lives and events that have been disrupted. That harmony and balance is always contrived to fit with what filmmakers believe to be dominant cultural values: victory over evil, as defined by the film, comfort to the previously afflicted, redemption of the lost and abused, reassertion of the family as the most valued cultural unit. (99)

Kolker demonstrates the critical tendency to associate Hollywood closure with the illusory powers of mimetic realism. Because of their self-disclosing tendencies, Modernist, Neomodernist, and Postmodern gestures in film are said to point out the ideological deception of classical Hollywood texts. As Orr puts it in *Cinema and Modernity*, "in the absence of absolute values lies a vision of the uncertainties of knowledge" (9). In the paradigm of scholarship treating invisible Hollywood cinema's movement towards closure, *Gladiator* is the problem: it and typical Hollywood texts like it naturalize viewers into the vast patriarchal meaning-making network. Taken as a single text, the hero only seems to attain an absolute truth, the final signified that brings holistic meaning to his entire existence.

In conclusion, as mentioned earlier, the hero's restoration of order is typically an incomplete one – the social utopia can never be reached and the wounded hero is continually searching for wholeness. In the case of *Gladiator*, holistic achievement is depicted explicitly, but it is in the form of the hero's dying dream, which can be taken as a vision of the afterlife and thus classical closure. However, the contention is that the hero can never attain classical closure. Reflecting the way viewers and critics normatively understand closure in an isolated text like *Gladiator* (and by extension to the function of closure in general), a restored order is seemingly achieved. However, if one places this film within the larger meaning-making network of Hollywood, the heroic vigilante never dies. The restored order so typically achieved by Hollywood manliness is always a dream. Sequels, genre films, and star personalities all point to Hollywood's episodic nature. In a way, Hollywood never closes. It cannot, for it is in the business of providing what was successful in the past, whether that be a sequel, a prequel, an adaptation, a genre variation, or another film from a popular star persona. Moreover, with a different face and a different star, the adventure of order, chaos, and "order restored," begins again. Even if one takes the gladiator's final gesture as a vision of the afterlife then, no transcendence is achieved – his wounds live on to be battled in another Hollywood text, by another Hollywood hero, which leads to another, and yet another, in an infinite manner, like the post-structuralist signifier. John Wayne is Clint Eastwood. To understand the role of Hollywood in the construction of manliness, audiences and especially critics need to look beyond a singular text and a singular hero and thus beyond the notion that Hollywood closure signifies transcendent wholeness for the hero. Closure then, at least as it applies to heroic masculinity, is not, as the critical Brechtian impulse would imply, the neat resolution of a Hollywood text. By extension, a more open text does not make for a necessarily effect critique of Hollywood's ideological machinery. Rather, closure is the dream of the transcendent signifier. A dream mistakenly recognized by those viewers and critics who have naturalized the mythic to such an extent that they overlook both a singular text's lack of holistic resolution and the fact that such a text exists within an entire media industry of similar adventures. The critical tendency to look to self-disclosing texts as progressive critiques of Hollywood indoctrination is valuable in that it was a necessary stage in understanding political and aesthetic relations between the mimetic and the self-disclosing. However, such a critical tendency draws attention away from the way Hollywood texts may actually function as an inter-connected and ongoing network. In other words, Hollywood narratives may actually be simultaneously closed and open. For the MTV generation and those raised on the internet and reality television, self-reflexive devices are no longer the master key to greater ideological awareness. Media itself has become more self-disclosing, interactive, and open-ended. Asserting that Hollywood heroic manliness leads to closure and thus the transcendent signifier is to mis-recognize the socialization function. In the larger trans-historical network and more immediate network of patriarchal socialization, manliness is an elusive entity that cannot be easily pinned down in a singular text or exposed by way of anti-mimetic techniques. Taken in this way, the twentieth-century Hollywood hero across genres, players, and time is an episodic entity, not unlike his oral forefather, evading mimetic wholeness and thus able to continually re-constitute himself.

Appendix Two: The Elite Educated and Two-Tier Professors

University derives from the Latin *universitas*, meaning a corporate body, which is particularly fitting today, when more and more North American universities find themselves in close partnership with big business. From the time of Plato, education was conceived as central to the governing bodies of society; certainly, the link today between business and university is not a surprising one. However, what may be startling is the continuing ideological bias favouring material and social prestige over other, more charitable and inclusive values. Despite academic efforts to expand the canon to include multicultural, female, and homosexual artists, there is an underlying dynamic of exclusion (the knowledgeable over the ignorant or the successful over the unsuccessful) that permeates the institution of academia itself.

For instance, ideally, while education exists as a tool of empowerment, pragmatically, education on its own is not as valuable as education that leads to greater financial and social power. Indeed, it may seem odd to think of education without some eventual practical financial benefit to the student (and some immediate benefit for the faculty and institution). In North American society, education is not necessarily pursued to foster cooperation, understanding, and mutual benefit amongst students. While the notion of education as a personal route to self-actualization is possible and may exist for some students and educators, traditionally, higher education often feeds into the prevailing ideology of competition for the sake of individual success. While competition in itself may be neither inherently negative nor positive, the history of attitudes towards competition and success in North America points to the maintenance of biases concerning hierarchy and prejudice. With Plato's notion of the philosopher-king, there came a sense of hierarchical division of power based upon intelligence and honor; in other words, in the western tradition, education has been identified with the eventual right to wield greater power over others in society. Successful graduates go on to become leaders in business, science, technology, politics, and education, wielding a greater social agency than those without education or economic power.

Competition and education have a history that is associated with pursuing and justifying unequal social relations.[282] In contemporary Canada, for instance, all education and work are not valued equally. Earning a degree is a marker of success, which implies a rise in social and often economic status. A degree from a university or a prestigious university carries with it more perceived value than a degree from a college or less prestigious university, even though the material one covers or skills one acquires may be similar. The gap becomes wider when one compares an individual with a formal education and an individual without a formal education. Generally, the individual with formal education is perceived to be smarter/more capable than the person without formal education. Similarly, all types of work are not perceived or rewarded equally as well. To use an extreme comparative example, a dishwasher may work longer and harder hours than a professor; however, a dishwasher will only be rewarded with minimum wage without benefits, while a professor's salary and benefits are far above the minimum in North America. While certain types of work, such as manual labour, leads to the breakdown of the body over time, the much softer work of research, writing, and lecturing actually enhances one's skills and expertise and even leads to greater and greater financial reward and social esteem. It is not enough to say that being an academic is more difficult work than other fields, and so professors should be paid more and enjoy more privileges than janitors or whomever else. When one takes a different vantage point, a vantage point that questions how and why certain skills are valued over others, then one realizes that the esteem of a professor is a somewhat arbitrary phenomenon. Indeed the gulf between the dishwasher and the professor is a historically determined one, harbouring at least a couple thousand of years of social bias.

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[282] To a certain degree, this is evident in some key works of literature that advise their readers in terms of the proper conduct for success; notable classics include Aristotle's *Nichomachean Ethics* and Machiavelli's *The Prince.* In the United States, Dale Carnegie's twentieth century bestseller *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, and earlier American works, such as Benjamin Franklin's annual *Poor Richard's Almanack* during the mid-eighteenth century, provided a business-specific approach to success. While Carnegie's original text continues to sell, Sun Tzu's *The Art of War* has become a favourite for many in business circles, as evidenced by the Science of Strategy institute (http://www.clearbridge.com/), which is dedicated to applying classical principles of strategy to contemporary life, especially business. Even Machiavelli's *The Prince* seems to have caught on in Alistair McAlpine's *The New Machiavelli: The Art of Politics in Business*, which also promises to provide the secrets to successful manipulation and deal making, as well as the patch to gaining greater economic and professional power. The popular North American obsession with such texts may indicate how important and how obsessed the culture is with gaining self-serving power. Other titles include: Michael A. Ledeen's *Machiavelli on Modern Leadership: Why Machiavelli's Iron Rules are as Timely and Important Today as Five Centuries Ago*, V.'s *The Mafia Manager: The Guide to the Corporate Machiavelli.* In *Sun Tzu was a Sissy: Conquer Your Enemies, Promote Your Friends, and Wage the Real Art of War* and *What Would Machiavelli Do? The Ends Justify the Meanness*, Stanley Bing parodies such self-help business books, critiquing their ruthless, two-faced, and backstabbing "ethics" of success.

Dishwashing, manual labour, and janitorial work are not only considered professions that do not require skill, they can also be associated with that of the slave, indentured worker, peasant, or otherwise lowly individual. As opposed to esteem, there is a stigma attached to such work that implies that one is incapable, unsuccessful, or even lazy. However, individuals may find themselves enduring such work not because they are naturally lacking in intellect, but because they are simply lacking in opportunity, or because their life situations (involving a myriad of factors) forces them to endure difficult work with long hours, low pay, and little respect. In contrast, a professor has a very comfortable and secure life. In the technical sense, the professor may even work far less than the dishwasher, but the financial and social rewards a professor attains for lecturing in front of a handful of classes are incomparable.[283] If manual work is considered unskilled and thus bears the stigma of the lazy slave, then a professor exists within a tradition of far more positive and culturally applauded professions. The professor is not unlike a missionary (lecturing those who are unaware), a scientist (engaging in profound research), and a philosopher (writing about ideas considered complex), stationed at a highly valuable cultural institution, the university. Quite possibly because missionaries, scientists, and philosophers have been considered individuals of divine inspiration or genius, the culture may forget that anyone is capable of becoming an esteemed professor. Indeed, one (idealistic) function of public education is to provide intellectual training for all students in an equitable fashion. While natural talents are of course valuable in any field, education implies a sense of equal opportunity. When it comes to becoming a professor, in terms of the basic skills, all one needs to do is read, write, and speak well. Put that way, it does not seem very impressive; indeed it seems like a profession that even a dishwasher, given the opportunity, could excel at. However, seeing a professor in such a manner is counter to the cultural tendency to amplify natural ability over learned skills (or a combination of ability and training, art and craft) in socially prized fields, such as a university professor. Perhaps, maintaining a sense of mystery and emphasizing natural talent may help the field protect its cultural status. Although if two thousand years of respect is any indicator, it does not seem like the dishwasher and the doctorate of philosophy will be changing positions any time soon.[284]

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[283] Typically, professors teach the same or a similar course throughout their careers. One can assume then, the first time a course is designed and taught more work is required than the tenth time the same curriculum is taught. There is an element of safe progressive gain for the professor in his or her work. Over time, because of experience, the professor may become increasingly comfortable and more of an expert in teaching a repeated course. Similarly, with graduate student supervision, professors can review ideas within a certain range of fields, honing their ability to not only assess work, but also gaining knowledge and new perspectives from student research and writing. There is a stress for students to make original contributions to knowledge that is beneficial for established professors to stay abreast with the latest scholarly ideas, debates, and discussions. Hence, professors are in positions where their knowledge can grow relatively quickly, through, for instance, teaching courses, supervising students, going to conferences, and delivering their own research. After a certain level of field-specific competence is reached, professors can maintain their knowledge through the same means. Furthermore, all of this learning happens within the comfort afforded by one's position, which provides both pay and authority.

The necessity for a social hierarchy does not stop at the walls of the ivory tower. The university itself institutionalizes a hierarchal relation between the valued professor and the professionally un-validated professor.[285] In the 1999 *Postmodern Culture* article, "Celeb-Reliance: Intellectuals, Celebrity, and Upward Mobility," Bruce W. Robbins explains how contemporary academia fosters a two-tier system, where a minority of professors are tenured or tenure-track, but a large underclass of instructors are forced to struggle through low-paying and high-demand work. Moreover, along with guaranteed lifetime employment with regular increases in pay, tenured academics enjoy perks that are foreign to the average working world, even within the field of public education, such as course relief, research and teaching assistants, and sabbatical. Robbins declares:

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[284] At least they will not be changing positions within North American universities. Because of its wealth, tenured North American professors may be more privileged (in terms of pay, benefits, research facilities, resources) than professors with similar levels of skill and training in other centres. Politically stable with the ease of both communication and travel, North America is a highly beneficial place for professors to make their careers. For instance, an average North American professor can easily travel across the continent for a myriad of conference opportunities, while professors in poorer centres may struggle to obtain access to library resources or even need to augment their income with extra work. On a related note, Huisman et al foresee major difficulties with academia, because of the declining attractiveness of a professorial career. In the 2002 *Journal of Higher Education* article, "Academic Careers from a European Perspective," Huisman et al believe career opportunities for young academics is a difficulty both in North America and Europe: "Despite extensive preparation, young academics confront restricted opportunities to become regular members of the academic community. Many of them are on a temporary contract, often with poor working conditions and uncertainties about reappointments. A long academic career seems unobtainable, which can lead to a negative image for academic employment. Those who opt for an academic career run the risk of moving from one contract to another without the opportunity to establish a particular research program" (141). Staving off a crisis, Huisman et al claim that many universities are ignoring the growing problem: "The widely held belief in the United States is that the faculty position is attractive and prestigious enough to encourage a sufficient supply of future faculty members irrespective of the current poor labor market. Research by Baldwin and Chronister (2000) and by Gappa and Leslie (1993) support this view. They found that many nontenure-track staff and part-time faculty members, respectively, aspired to full-time faculty positions despite less-than-happy experiences in nontenure-track positions" (142). On an ethical level, professorial positions may also become less attractive, because current professors and students are taking little action to remedy the two-tier problem in academia. That is, rather than being a profession associated with a community's cutting-edge ideas, the profession is becoming tainted by a lack of action, other than action that helps solidify one's own tenure. Such a development is made all the more discomforting when one considers that throughout the twentieth century, under less comforting circumstances, many academics have experienced imprisonment, exile, and even death for upholding the right to think, write, and educate in an uncensored manner. If trends that Huisman and others identify continue, then academia will become associated with complacency, as well as self-serving comfort and glory, rather than a haven for the power of education to motivate a community, an institution actively dedicated to upholding the value of equality (through open access), and a cultural symbol representing a society's respect for knowledge.

[285] Academic conferences and publishing are highly important ventures for the prestige of both the university and the individual professor. In the 2006 *Journal of Scholarly Publishing* article, "Prestige and the University Press," Steven E. Gump reflects upon the origin of American university presses: "Is it mere coincidence, then, that university presses came into existence precisely around the time when university administrators began to pay attention to their respective 'images' vis-à-vis 'rival' institutions? Indeed, correspondence exchanged between President Charles Eliot of Harvard and President Gilman of Johns Hopkins in 1886 led historian Laurence Veysey to conclude that 'scholarly journals published on one campus aroused jealousy in administrators elsewhere.' The pressure was on, and the competition had begun. University presses came to play a central role in this contest for institutional prestige" (70).

> What clearly deserves complaint is the tendency, in an increasingly corporatized university, to institute a two-tiered employment structure and a two-tiered salary scale: that is, to increase the already dramatic divide between fewer and fewer tenured and tenure-track people on the one hand (whether stars or not) and more and more untenured, adjunct, part-time people on the other. (http://muse.jhu.edu.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/journals/postmodern_culture/v009/9.2robbins.html)

Oddly, although the humanities often fosters more leftist values, is concerned with the rights of minorities, and often champions provocative political causes, the university sustains a capitalistic divide, creates an underclass of educators, and generally ignores (or must ignore and perhaps cannot correct) the problem of a wide gap in salary, workload, and benefits between tenured faculty and untenured faculty. Hence, Robbins says:

> Those few academics lucky enough to occupy what Stanley Aronowitz calls "the last good job in America" must of course expect the envy and the satire that their privileges attract. They, or rather we, are legitimate targets, for we are a swing vote; it matters a great deal whether we join the fight against the two-tier system or merely continue to enjoy the fruits of that system (http://muse.jhu.edu.login.ezproxy.library.ualberta.ca/journals/postmodern_culture/v009/9.2robbins.html[286]).

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[286] The temptation of personal gain over correcting a social ill is not unique to academia. Taking the model of labour unions, *Cogs in the Classroom Factory* provides a model for academic organization. The 2004 *Labour Studies Journal* reviews Deborah Herman's and Julie Schmid's work. In "*Cogs in the Classroom Factory: The Changing Identity of Academic Labour*," Gordon Lafer says, "How do you take weak-willed

The difficulty, as Robbins alludes to earlier in his text, is that academics desire legitimacy. By gaining tenure, academics attain the institutional support and thus the cultural prestige that deems them a success. Indirectly, yet increasingly, tenure success depends upon those "have-nots." As a result, individual economic pursuit is valued over correcting a social ill. For instance, an individual's push to gain tenure and then course-relief and then sabbatical takes priority over remedying the problem of a growing academic underclass. Indeed, addressing the academic underclass admits a problem with the very institution that grants one the cultural status of being successful; critiquing the institution for fostering a wider social problem (the corporate tendency to rely upon a disenfranchised underclass) then, opens up the fissure where one's own individual stamp as successful may be called into question.

An awareness of the historical bias and continued bias towards success, competition, and the lack of success within the university setting may help educators better understand their own cultural status and legacy; quite possibly, educators may aim to encourage their peers and their students to improve themselves without a sense of entitlement, while sustaining a sense of respect for others. Besides such grand social aims, more specifically, the western mythos of success and the tradition of hierarchical divisions may lend some insight into the persuasive force of superiority theory, the

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academic suck-ups and turn them into militant union members in less than a year? It is in answering this question that *Cogs* makes its most useful contribution. The book's essays describe a series of actual faculty and graduate student campaigns over the past decade, with nearly every chapter focused on the question of how various campaign strategies succeeded or failed in transforming the union consciousness of academics in a short period of time. While the answers vary, and there is obviously no formula, the richness of the book is its ability to place the concrete details of campaign stories in the context of this theoretical question of how unions transform the consciousness of their members" (123).

persistence of exclusive theoretical categorization, and the tendency to excise the comic from traditional comic categories.[287]

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[287] As a byproduct, an awareness of western historical attitudes towards agency and success may help academia become more sensitive to gauging and fostering a less self-serving and selfish notion of success amongst professors, students, and even those outside academia.

Appendix Three: Addressing Cultural Attitudes and Theoretical Tendencies

The academic tradition concerning the comic and the general western historical attitude towards laughter have largely been cautionary and at times, negative. Culturally, the spread of Puritanical religious beliefs allowed for some laughter, so long as the laughter relaxed and re-energized its audience, before another day of hard work. Allowable comic texts and allowable laughter served a serious social purpose, to create better citizens and greater productivity. This in itself is not necessarily negative, but such an attitude comes with an undercurrent of warning, and at times, a sweeping fear of the danger of comical ridiculousness and the bellows of voiced breaths it inspires. Such cautionary signs imply a mind and body split, as well as a civilized versus uncivilized split, where the bodily and uncultured impulses are to be kept in check by the governing intellect.[288] Seeing the comic as something to hide for the sake of decorum, as something ridiculous to deride in others and correct in oneself, or as something to use in service of social education or productivity, for the sake of socio-economic pragmatics, there may be a correlative bias, in culture and theory, against the comical side of human beings. This bias may contribute to a resistance against understanding the comical as a holistic part of human experience and expression.

Early on, scholars deemed comedy to be the domain of the ugly, low, and ridiculous, while cultural mores insisted that laughter was a foolish expression, indicative of a loss of cognitive control.[289] Nevertheless, the comic did find an early home in both rhetoric and in drama. In rhetoric, witty comments were the allowable and preferred type of laughter-inducing art, while in drama, ridiculing stock characters was done in the service of high social standards and logic, exposing vice and folly by laughing at those who do not embody the implied ideal. Francis Cornford, in *The Origin of Attic Comedy*, saw a ritual impulse in comic drama, whereby fertility rites are secularized for the stage. Henri Bergson in *Laughter*, Susanne Langer in *Feeling and Form*, and Northrop Frye in *Anatomy of Criticism* follow Cornford's celebration of comic vitality. The natural, communal, and bodily origins of the ritual are channelled through Bergson's stress on the social instruction of advising flexibility over mechanical behaviour. For Langer, comedy typifies a natural human impulse; renewing and demonstrating the resilience of the human spirit, comedy is a creative birthplace. Comedy's association with spring becomes an explicit analytical metaphor for Frye's theory of modes, where the comical is both the wish-fulfillment realm of the green world and the means to social education; the blocking figure is exposed for his or her bias and the youthful couple may celebrate their cleansed society with marriage. With comedy serving the more serious master of social harmony, a community ideal is reached.

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[288] In terms of the mind versus the body, consider how Plato advises the intellect to rule over laughter; or, consider, how Freud associates the libidinal energies with comic display. In terms of civilized versus uncivilized, consider, for instance, how comedy has been associated with the rustic and rural or countryside, as opposed to the governing centre. Historically, class division and divisions between intellect and taste influence the distinction between comedy of character and comedy of idea.

[289] Ugliness for Bergson is rigidity that may be of the body or of the soul, without necessarily being painful. Bergson's conception is in the tradition of Aristotle. In *An Aristotelian Theory of Comedy*, Lane Cooper

Sigmund Freud, following Darwin, Ernst von Brucke, Herbert Spencer, and Karl Groos directly, but also loosely connected to Aristotelian comic catharsis, creates a highly influential release theory that claims to explain the relationship between one's more aggressive and libidinal urges and one's social censor, a relationship that is typified by the taboo-flirting function of jokes and joking.[290] On this point, it is important to point

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explains that comedy represents people of an inferior moral bent or weakness. The inferiority is a shortcoming, quirk, or disproportion which is not painful, harmful, or corrupting (176).

[290] Freud's psychodynamics is directly related to the scientific concept of thermodynamics. Adopting Darwin's notion that emotion is physical energy, Freud believes the id provides the energy to fulfill the

out how contemporary literary studies and media studies (quite possibly because of the emphasis on sociology) generally tend to overlook the connection of comic theory to biology and cognition. Freud and Bergson are such cases, with one following the tradition of laughter as a biological expression (Dionysian festivals, fertility rituals) and the other following the tradition (ancient rhetoric, use of wit) that associates the comical with cognition. Unlike Bergson, who associates comedy with the accessible cognitive faculties, Freud connects the comical with the sphere of repressed libidinal forces.[291] Despite their opposing conceptions, both Bergson and Freud become highly influential in literary studies of the comic, unified by an explanatory navigation of the negotiation between the social and individual, or the mental and emotional. In line with general cultural attitudes towards laughter, like a wild animal, the comical side of human expression had to be reigned in by the wiser, more socially responsible side of *homo ridens*.

The responsibility was social, because the dangerous Dionysus cult lurked behind a ribald joke or garrulous guffaw. For Charles Baudelaire and Albert Camus, the danger led to a depressing nihilism; hence, the clown was truly sad. For many, such as Nietzsche and Bergson, the clown's makeup revealed stupidity, with Nietzsche calling for a new type of mystical laughter, and Bergson allowing the laughter to be thrust upon the jester in big shoes, so that the laughers are reminded to not trip over themselves. Nietzsche's Dionysianism and Bergson's élan vital, along with Freud's energo-

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basic human needs of survival. Scientist Ernst von Brucke assumed all living organisms are biological energy systems, functioning in adherence to the law of the conservation of energy. Social Darwinist Herbert Spencer, in *Principles of Psychology* (1855) advanced the notion that the mind is a biological entity that developed in response to the environment, not unlike the body's evolution. Another evolutionary theorist, Karl Groos believed play was an essential element of mammalian development, because play releases surplus energy and aids in learning.

[291] Freud's conception relates to the ancient Greek notion of comic catharsis, where comedy serves to release pent up energies in a socially therapeutic fashion.

economics, accepted the energy of the comical, but directed laughter's momentum to suit their specific philosophical frameworks. For others, the clown's makeup hid anger, not sadness or stupidity; Mikhail Bakhtin and Michel Foucault preferred the more politically rebellious side of comedy. However, unlike the earlier tradition that viewed comic rebellion as a means to learning proper social behaviour, the carnivalesque is more fundamentally opposed to the very society that spawned it – the jester longs to become king. In the hands of Julia Kristeva, the carnival promises political liberation, but by the time the carnival reaches Kristeva, the comical had itself been liberated from the carnival. A similar exorcism occurs with parody, which, in the hands of Frederic Jameson, becomes blank, losing its more silly side, in favour of laying bare the device, a foregrounding of surface, of form over content – all in service of postmodernism.

Unlike centuries of Puritanical or philosophical warnings against comic playfulness, some postmodern critics, such as Gilles Deleuze, Jean-François Lyotard, and Jacques Derrida, found a supposed home for the comical. Indeed, from their vantage point, everything – language, art, criticism, and reality – can be identified as a sort of game, stemming from human construction, rather than natural forces. Indirectly, all of a sudden, some glory was bestowed upon the ideas of incongruity fostered by Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer, instead of the previously triumphant ridiculing of Thomas Hobbes and his ancient predecessor, Plato. Although Aristotle, Madius, and even Plato acknowledged the incongruous element of the comic, Plato's ideas about the comic as ridicule and laughter as ungainly had remained relatively unchallenged until, most notably, in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century, when Immanuel Kant and Arthur Schopenhauer – preceded, less notably, by the seventeenth and eighteenth century work of Earl of Shaftesbury (1671-1713), Mark Akenside (1721-1770), Francis Hutcheson (1694-1746), and James Beattie (1735-1803) – placed an enhanced emphasis on the more light-hearted side of the surprise twist. During the twentieth century, Arthur Koestler and Victor Raskin built upon the incongruous element, through bisociation theory and script-based semantics.[292] Directly or indirectly inspired by Johann Huizinga's opus on the human impulse for play and recreation, *Homo Ludens*, John Morreall in *Taking Laughter Seriously* and *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humour*, George Aichele in *Theology as Comedy*, and Barry Sanders in *Sudden Glory* critiqued the negative cultural attitude towards playfulness and laughter, ultimately widening the function of the comic to align itself with play and then, postmodernism. In "Living On," from *Philosophy Today*, Robert S. Gall goes so far as to insists that Derrida's philosophy is a comic one; in *Comedy After Postmodernism*, Kirby Olson claims postmodernism finally allows odd works to enter the canon; in *Circus of the Mind*, Lance Olsen associates the deconstructive postmodern impulse with the comic one.

Despite such signs of a possible love for the comical, Gillian Pye thinks otherwise and there continues to be a non-professional and professional conflation. In the 2006 *Humor* article, "Comedy Theory and the Postmodern," Gillian Pye critiques, amongst others, Susan Purdie's (in *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse*) post-structural psychoanalytic approach for using the comic to serve the more serious agenda of postmodernism. For Pye, "playful" postmodern strategies are "confused with the comic," because the notion of element of achieving coherence (incongruity and then resolution) is overlooked (68).[293] Along with Pye's observation, the conflation of non-professional and professional humour seems to persist in postmodern discourse. While in many instances this may not be a problem, because humour is a widespread cultural phenomenon, it would be a mistake to assume a professional comedian is little more than letting out his libidinal urges or celebrating the Carnival. While a strand of postmodernism helps celebrate certain comic qualities, mirroring how parody becomes respectable through Kristeva's and Jameson's comical lobotomy, funniness here becomes respectable through association, when paired with the philosophical gymnastics and more serious political and philosophical aims of postmodernism. Indeed, if everything is a game, then it is not simply that the comic gains greater notoriety with postmodernism; rather, the comic becomes an appropriate metaphor for the postmodern everything.[294]

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[292] For Amy Carrell, Raskin's script-based semantic theory is distinct from the three major traditions of superiority/social, incongruity/cognitive, and release/play theories. For Carrell, the work of Salvatore Attardo (Five-Level Model for Joke Analysis), the work of Ruch, Attardo, and Raskin's (General Theory of Verbal Humor), and her own theoretical contribution (Audience-Based Theory of Verbal Humor) are all distinct from three traditional comic theory categories. Some of Carrell's views can be found online in her historical survey of views towards humour at the following address: http://www.uni-duesseldorf.de/WWW/MathNat/Ruch/PSY356-Webarticles/Historical_Views.pdf.

From the perspective of comic nescience, another weakness of post-structuralism and postmodernism is the tendency to target Hegelian, colonialist, Humanist, or Humanist-type beliefs as an origin point for human conflict.[295] Such targeting is too certain for this study's conception of the comic. In particular, Lyotard targets Hegel's speculative dialectic, the claim that progress is a result of humanity's rational powers, and the notion of emancipation, the belief in freeing humanity from dogma and suffering. The Renaissance value of science and the power of the human to observe, understand, and manipulate the world around him or her becomes a target. In *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, Linda Hutcheon says:

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[293] In "Beyond a Joke," the 2004 article in *The Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Mark Weeks explains that the postmodern conception of desire and play, which take Nietzsche as an influence, significantly differs from Nietzsche's original conception. By subsuming the comic under postmodern philosophy, postmodernism sustains the tradition of indirectly devaluing comic art to serve a more accepted critical field (postmodern theory) and explicitly serious political or philosophical goal.

[294] Claiming postmodernism believes "everything is a game" is oversimplifying the complexity and variance of postmodern thought. Nonetheless, the phrase hopes to signify the postmodern emphasis on for instance, the social construction of meaning, the impossibility of accessing truth, and the stress on personae over fixed identity, and discourse over an immutable reality. Since comic texts are often characterized by instances of mistaken identities, verbal misunderstanding, and naïve blindness, the metaphorical affinity with postmodern philosophy is apt.

[295] Frederick Crews is a Humanist who points to the difficulty with the reception of his parodic academic essays, in part because of his own association with Humanism. In the preface of *Postmodern Pooh*, Crews declares: "*Postmodern Pooh* forms a bookend, as it were, concluding my long if uneventful career of devotion both to humanistic values and to *Pooh*. And are they really so different, one from the other?" (xvi). In such self-deprecation, Crews points out the contemporary bias against Humanism. That is, for several critics, Humanism serves as a target (especially for its universal values), a source of problems that the postmodern viewpoint claims to overcome.

> There is a long history of many skeptical sieges to positivism and humanism, and today's footsoldiers of theory – Foucault, Derrida, Habermas, Vattimo, Baudrillard – follow in the footsteps of Nietzsche, Heidegger, Marx, and Freud, to name but a few, in their attempts to challenge the empiricist, rationalist, humanist assumptions of our cultural systems, including those of science. (6)

It may be that metanarratives, or the European male colonist believed in his own superiority and these beliefs caused exploitative action. However, the link between cause and effect here may be weaker than assumed by post-structuralism and postmodernism. Moreover, the belief of the Humanist or the colonist does not matter, as much as the actions of the colonialist. While the western legal combination of *mens rea* and *actus rea* is implied by the causal post-structural claim of Humanist belief and action, questioning such a narrative of western judicial necessity may indicate at least two alternative possibilities. One, perhaps, the colonialist and colonized relationship was not as clear-cut as is implied by the targeting of Humanist assumptions.[296] Violence, slavery, genocide, and other crimes precede Humanism and continue well after the impact of both post-structuralism and postmodernism. In other words, Humanism is not to blame, but it makes for an easy target. Or, two, perhaps the motivation for violence and other crimes is less complex than implied by either the critique of metanarratives or the critique of Humanist values; perhaps, people were and continue to be motivated by greed, power, hatred, jealousy, prestige, and other such emotions. Despite post-structural claims against universalizing tendencies, it is odd how Lyotard and others make rather sweeping claims about the power of metanarratives or even the dynamics of Humanism.[297]

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[296] For instance, in the 2000 *Ethnohistory* article "Quirípas and Mostacillas: The Evolution of Shell Beads as a Medium of Exchange in Northern South America," Rafael A. Gassón argues that some aboriginal economic institutions developed because of a dialogue between Amerindian and European economies and communities, not simply because of Western economic domination and exploitation. Jonathan Hart's *Contesting Empires: Opposition, Promotion, and Slavery* explores the complex dynamics of the imperial age, pointing out that an empire can and was contested not only from the ruled, but also from within, by Europeans: "At the heart of the book is the tension between the promotion of empire and the opposition to empire. The contest can be within an empire as well as between them and contestation can be as much

By stressing Humanist beliefs, post-structural and post-colonial theory embody the judicial method of demonstrating guilt by linking an act to a knowing subject; for instance, slavery's source is the racist, or the source of colonization is the ethnocentric imperialist. Indirectly, by claiming a postmodern incredulity towards metanarratives, Lyotard is saying that up until the postmodern era, the guilty act (*actus reus*) can be easily linked to a guilty mind (*mens rea*).[298] Indirectly or directly highlighting the causal

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about internal debate as about conflict and war with external powers. The very intricacy of the story of empire is that the opposition between us and them has never been as set as ideology might delineate" (1).

[297] Referring to a dictionary definition, Tony Davies in *Humanism* points out, "The seven distinct sub-divisions of humanism rather conservatively offered by the *Oxford English Dictionary* in truth represent only a fraction of the sense and contexts in which the word has been used, and a drastic simplification of those. It is one of those words, like 'realism' or 'socialism', whose range of possible uses runs from the pedantically exact to the cosmically vague. Like them, too, it carries, even in the most neutrally descriptive contexts, powerful connotations, positive or negative, of ideological allegiance, its very imprecision making it all the more serviceable as a shibboleth of approval or deprecation" (3).

[298] The source of contemporary western legal theory stems from Edward Coke's *Institutes*. From *The Selected Writings and Speeches of Sir Edward Coke*, the passage from the *Institutes* develops as follows: "So as there must be a compassing or imagination, for an Act done *per infortunium,* without compassing, intent, or imagination: is not within this Act, as it appeareth by the expresse words thereof. *Et actus non facit reum, nisi mens fit rea.* And if it be not within the words of this Act, then by force of a clause hereafter, viz. *Et pur ceo que plusors auters, &c.* It cannot be adjuged treason, untill it be declared treason by Parliament, which is the remedie in that case, which the makers of the law provided in that case. This compassing, intent, or imagination, though secret, is to be tryed by the peers, and to be discovered by circumstances precedent, concomitant, and subsequent, with all endeavour evermore for the safety of the King" (961). The editor of this collection of Coke's writings, Steve Sheppard, translates the key phrase in the following manner: "An act does not make [the doer of it] guilty, unless the mind be guilty, that is, unless the intention be criminal. The intent and the act must both concur to constitute the crime" (961).

what comic nescience may be able to articulate is that despite our claims to knowledge, from whatever disciplinary or experiential perspective, perhaps, we "do not know," or cannot be certain. For instance, a person may believe in transcendence, god, or destiny; however, logic may not be able to demonstrate the existence of god. Another person may claim transcendence, god, and destiny are simply the result of powerful discourse. While this claim is easier to prove, the method overlooks how faith does not necessarily rest entirely on logic or scientific proof. In large part, such claims of mysterious otherworldly forces rest on belief, which is a matter of faith and perspective, rather than something more concrete or demonstrable through solid proof. If varying comic texts test categories, regardless of political affiliation or philosophical vantage point, then it is possible to claim that the bulk of the comic texts examined in this study, each with differing targets, advance the possibility of not knowing, of being uncertain, or of pointing out the incongruities of existence.[301] However, the sense of uncertainty in human experience often seems ideologically overpowered by the desire to feel in control of one's surroundings and circumstances, or even to feel superior over others.

One recurrent tendency in the study of the comic is the domination of superiority or hostility theory.[302] While the domination itself may or may not be valid, the continued popularity of the theory in both academia and the wider culture may reveal some interesting qualities about how western society views intelligence, agency, and success, as well as the comic, which is often associated with a lack of intelligence and agency. Also, noticeably, twofold tendencies characterize the critical management of the comic. On the one hand, to be made more respectable, the comic is downplayed or taken out of traditionally (even definitively) comic genres, such as parody. On the other hand, to gain greater respect, the comic is aligned with serious social (Bergson and Frye), political (Bakhtin), and philosophical (Gall, Olson, and Olsen) purposes. Both hands seem tied to some sort of greater utility of the comic, other than the immediate function of arousing laughter or the possibility of enjoying uncertainty or nescience.

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[301] For instance, it is not unusual for some stand up comedians to explore an issue from a multitude of perspectives. Even within a single act, a comedian may argue one side and then the other, pointing out the absurdities of either side and leaving things at that, without necessarily claiming that one perspective is inherently superior to another. Or, on different nights, to different audiences, a comedian may emphasize different targets. The motivation may be the differing political tastes of the audience, or it may be how the comedian feels on that particular night.

[302] Alongside the rise of incongruity and release theories over the last two centuries, superiority continues to develop. Referring to Carrell's survey (http://www.uni-duesseldorf.de/WWW/MathNat/Ruch/PSY356-Webarticles/Historical_Views.pdf) of key figures, in the nineteenth century, Hegel in *The Philosophy of Fine Art* and Alexander Bain in *The Emotions and the Will* uphold the triumphant side of understanding laughter, with Anthony M. Ludovici in *The Secret of Laughter* making an evolutionary emphasis during the early twentieth century. In the 2002 *Poetics Today* article "Humor Mechanisms in Film Comedy," Jeroen Vandaele argues for an interactional incongruity-superiority framework, which merges elements of incongruity alongside and in his examples, under superiority (226).

Although comic nescience speaks to varying biases and seeks to identify comical works as complex, comic nescience does not believe the prejudices against the comical are necessarily bad or unwelcome. From the view of comic nescience, a comical work's positioning as low, unserious, and so on, adds to its ambiguity and thus value. A part of the power of some comical works is a tension against prevailing social, artistic, and theoretical standards or hierarchies. This dissertation is interested in identifying the dynamic of comical forces in a holistic manner, but comic nescience insists that these forces exist in an important and fluctuating tension with one another.[303]

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[303] Comic works should be disrespected and respected, because comical works are often culturally, socially, and politically disrespectful, but worthy of artistic respect.